

HubSpot



Sleeknote



10-Step Guide To

# Increasing Your Email Click-Through Rate



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# Introduction

Let's face it: we all receive a huge number of emails every day. How many of your emails do you actually open, or even click? Probably not that many.

It's not just you. Consumers from around the world do the same. Across industries, the average click-through rate is [about 3.5%](#).

The [click-through rate](#), defined as the percentage of people who clicked a link in your email out of the people who opened your email, is frequently the number one metric that email marketers strive to improve. Although, increasing this number with each email sent can be a difficult task.

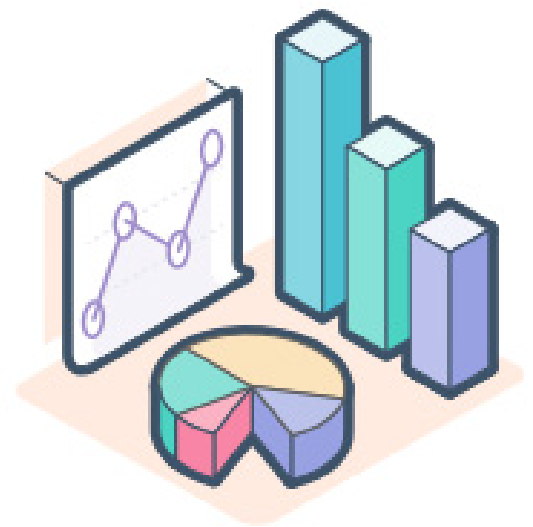


However, all is not lost! There are many things you can do to increase your click-through rate. That's why HubSpot and Sleeknote have teamed up to create this ebook.

Inside this 10-step guide, you'll learn how to segment your database to increase conversions, insert the right media into your emails, create custom calls-to-action (CTAs), and more.

HubSpot is the leading provider of marketing, sales, and service software with a free CRM at the core of its growth suite.

Sleeknote provides on-site engagement tools which includes everything you need to build your audience, engage website visitors, promote popular products, and reduce cart abandonment.



Together, HubSpot and Sleeknote are leaders in the email marketing world and we are excited to help you improve your email marketing performance.

Before we get started, let's set some click-through rate benchmarks.

# Email CTR Benchmarks

In order for you to understand how to improve your email click-through rate, you need to first benchmark your current email performance.

To calculate your average CTR manually, compile your recent email data (a few months back will do) into one place. Include the number of people who opened each email and the number of people who clicked a link in each email. Take the sum of each of these columns and divide the total number of clicks by the total number of opens. The resulting percentage is your average email click-through rate.

Or, if you're using an [email marketing software](#), this value will already be calculated for you wherever your email stats are shown. Now, how does this performance compare to other players in your industry?

Use [the chart on the next page](#) to compare your CTR to your industry average.

While industry benchmarks are a great way to understand how your current email marketing efforts are performing, there is always room for improvement. Whether you're above or below the industry average, this 10-step guide will help you to continually improve your email click-through rate.

Let's get started!

| Industry                   | CTR  |
|----------------------------|------|
| Transportation             | 6.5% |
| Financial Services         | 2.5% |
| Telecommunications         | 4.7% |
| Software & Online Services | 2.8% |
| Consumer Products          | 2.5% |
| Consumer Services          | 2.0% |
| Corporate Services         | 2.8% |
| Energy & Environmental     | 3.9% |
| Food & Beverage            | 3.8% |
| Healthcare & Biotech       | 3.3% |
| Industrial Products        | 2.4% |
| Insurance                  | 4.6% |
| Sports & Recreation        | 4.0% |
| Lodging & Travel Agencies  | 3.8% |
| Marketing & Advertising    | 3.8% |
| Media & Publishing         | 2.7% |
| Nonprofits & Government    | 3.2% |
| Real Estate & Construction | 2.9% |
| Retail & Ecommerce         | 3.0% |
| Schools & Education        | 4.2% |

# Understand Your Database

If you're like most email marketers, you spend hours trying to get subscribers and customers to read and act on your emails.

After all, no one wants to see their emails wither away in their subscribers' inboxes.

It's a waste of money, and it doesn't offer a return on the time—or money—you invested in them.

The mistake most marketers make is that they include their entire email list when they send email campaigns.

Think about it: Is your entire list really interested in a sale on dresses?

Or would it make more sense to only send the dress sale email to prospects who've previously shown interest in or bought dresses?

It's all about understanding your database and realizing that marketing to everyone the same way is as effective as not marketing at all.

So how do you cater to the individual and increase click-throughs?

Email segmentation.



## How to segment your database for higher engagement

Segmenting your audience and sending targeted email campaigns is one of the most effective ways to increase engagement and drive more sales.

Here are a few examples of how you can easily segment your email audience to increase click-throughs. You can segment by:

- Signup source
- Previous engagement
- Purchase history

If you have multiple signup options on your site with different calls-to-action, you should definitely segment your subscribers based on where they signed up. For example, if a user signs up for a coupon code, it's fair to say that they have high purchase intent.

You can then use your email campaigns as a way to keep these subscribers engaged and drive them to make that final purchase.

Here's an example from [Ban.do](#):

ban.dō

SHOP   NEW ARRIVALS   EXCLUSIVES   INSTAGRAM

AAAHHHI

# NICE TO MEET YOU!



**HERE'S WHAT TO EXPECT FROM OUR EMAILS.**

lotsa new products, some cool photos, a few jokes, maybe a dancing cat here and there, and (woohoo!) exclusive deals...

like this one for

## 10% OFF

use code:

**HANGOUT**

expires 11/15/17

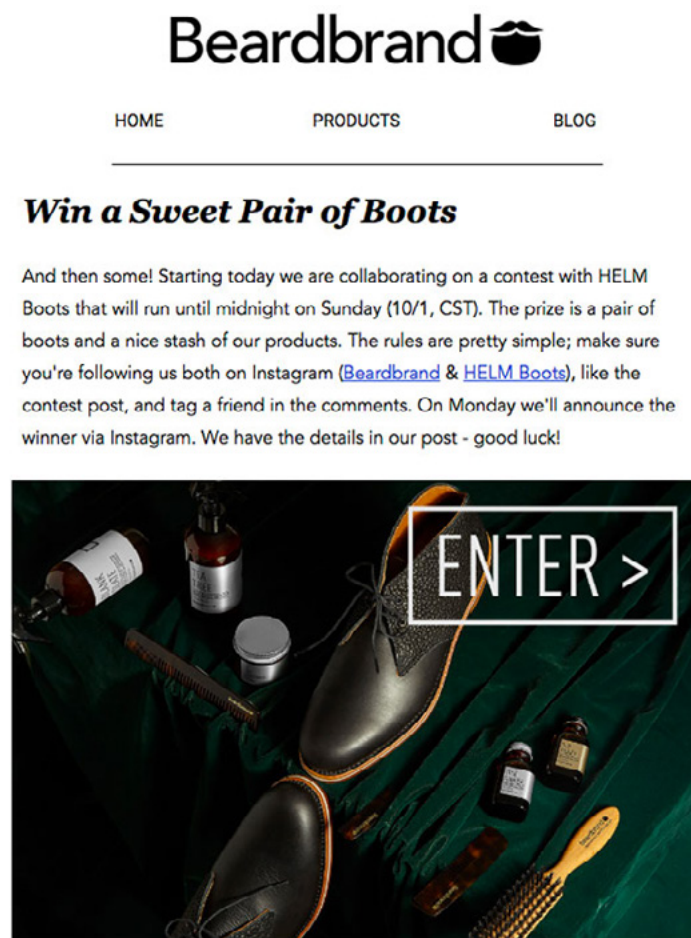


Another option is to segment based on engagement.

Looking at how subscribers' have engaged with your brand previously will indicate how to approach them in the future. This way, they'll receive emails that are aligned with their past actions.

The result? They'll be more likely to engage and follow through on your CTAs in future emails.

For example, if a subscriber clicks through in emails with competitions, you should send them more emails with competitions. Here's an example from [Beardbrand](#):



Another great way to engage your email database is to segment based on what they've bought in the past.

A company that understands this is [ASOS](#).

Probably 9 out of 10 of my ASOS orders are for dresses, and this is one of the emails I get from them:



Whether you're over dry Jan or the only shots you're doing are wheatgrass, it's time for a sale-ibration. So here's up to 70% off all kinds of dresses for work, play and, of course, partying.

[SHOP ASOS DRESSES >](#)

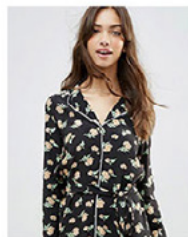
[SHOP BRANDED DRESSES >](#)



ASOS Dress with Split  
420-DKK-295 DKK



Miss Selfridge Velvet Dress  
660-DKK-275 DKK



ASOS Dress in Floral  
380-DKK-225 DKK

[SHOP ALL SALE >](#)

Relevant? YES!

There are many ways to segment your database, so ask yourself: What do I know about my subscribers and customers, and how can I use that information to send only relevant emails to them?

Remove unengaged contacts from your pool

No matter how awesome you are at email marketing, over time there will inevitably be subscribers who become inactive.

Maybe they initially started out at as sizzling hot leads, and some might have even made a purchase.

But whatever the reason, they've gone cold and are no longer opening your emails.

Every once in a while, you'll want to clean up your list and remove any inactive subscribers.

Besides spending time and energy on people who are unlikely to ever buy, this is important for increasing your email deliverability as well.

### Make sure all of your contacts have opted in

There's been a long, heated debate among email marketers for years as to whether it's better to use a single opt-in or double opt-in when signing up new subscribers. And both sides have valid points.

Using a single opt-in will certainly grow your list quicker because people don't have to verify that they do in fact want to subscribe.

They simply type in their email address and click subscribe. Voila. They're done.

But you could argue that going the single opt-in route means that your email list won't be as high-quality than if you used a double opt-in.

Why?

While it's true that you do make new subscribers jump through an extra hoop with a double opt-in, it ensures that they really do want to receive emails from your company.

It wasn't the result of some type of error, someone else signing them up, etc.

By having them confirm, you can be certain that the people who sign up are genuinely interested and want to stay in touch with your brand.

The way I see it, this is one of the most straightforward ways to increase email open rates.

# Write an Effective Subject Line

If you want to get noticed in readers' inboxes, writing eye-catching email subjects and following best practices is crucial.

## Curiosity

How often were you warned as a child, "Do NOT push that button"?

Now: How often did you actually obey your parent's wishes? Not often, right?

If not, who can blame you: curiosity is a powerful motivator. Our need to bridge the gap between what we know and what we want to know is what we refer to as the curiosity gap.

In email marketing, when we're presented with a compelling reason to click-through (or NOT click-through), we can't help but satisfy our curiosity.

To build curiosity into your subject lines, you can ask readers an intriguing question.

Here's a fun example from [Poo Pourri](#):



## Use Personalisation

In 1936, Dale Carnegie wrote one of the most influential books of all time, [How to Win Friends and Influence People](#). In it, Carnegie revealed one of his simplest, yet most important findings after years of researching human behaviour:

“A person’s name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language.”

It’s no surprise, then, many marketers include the recipient’s name when writing email subject lines. In fact, emails with personalized subject lines are 26% more likely to be opened and many marketers have even found a 73% increase in revenue per email.

Here’s an example from Frank Kern:

Invitation for Rikke

Frank Kern News@frankkernhelpdesk.com via kartra.net  
to me ▾

Hi Rikke,

I'm working on a case study where we basically give you any of my training you want ...for free ...just to see what happens.

If you're interested, [watch this](#) :-)

Talk soon,  
Frank

## Be informative

In 2011, Jonah Berger, a professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, carried out a research study analyzing why certain articles go viral. Among his discoveries, Berger discovered useful content is shared more often.

The goal with your campaigns, remember, isn't to increase brand awareness or boost revenue—it's to add value to your audience. And there's no better way to do that than creating useful content and notifying readers of such with appropriate subject lines.

Here's an example from Brian Dean:

### How to Get Targeted Traffic From YouTube (My 5 Best Tips)



**Brian Dean** [brian@backlinko.com](mailto:brian@backlinko.com) via [aweber.com](https://aweber.com)

to me ▾

Hey,

I'll be honest with you:

When I first launched my YouTube channel I didn't really know what I was doing.

I published quality videos...but only a handful of people watched each one.

It felt like YouTube's search engine was punching me square in the mouth.

When reading a subject line like this, you immediately know what information you can expect to find in the email.

Make sure to keep your informative subject lines curious so prospects will actually open and read your email.



# Be Human

We've all tried it.

You start a live chat, send an email to support, or call customer service, and all you get are automated responses or you're put on hold.

It's not a good customer experience.

We want to talk to human beings, and email is no different.

Sure you can automate your email marketing to a certain extent, but you need to keep a human and personal touch if you want your readers to click-through.

## Use storytelling and humour

People like to think that the decisions they make are based on data and analyses of possible alternatives.

But, in reality, our [emotions greatly influence](#) and, in most cases, determine our decisions.

And that's one of the reasons humor in email marketing is highly effective.

In fact, [50% of European and American consumers](#) prefer humour in marketing over any other messaging theme.

Combine humour with storytelling to build a stronger and more personal relationship with your audience, and increase opens and click-throughs.

Here's an example of a recent email I sent to a segment of our email list:



Hi Alex,

So, a lot of exciting things are happening at Sleeknote.

And I wanted you guys to be the first to be updated.

Last week we went to a seaside hotel on the west coast of Denmark. We call this "Workation" and it's the event of the year.

Here's are a few of us at the beach (I'm the one trying to photobomb Sam):



Let your audience know the people behind the business and you'll undoubtedly increase engagement across all platforms.

## Avoid no-reply emails

No one wants to read emails that aren't sent from an actual person.

Your "reply to" name and address must be accurate and identify the person or business who initiated the message—or your email might end up in spam.

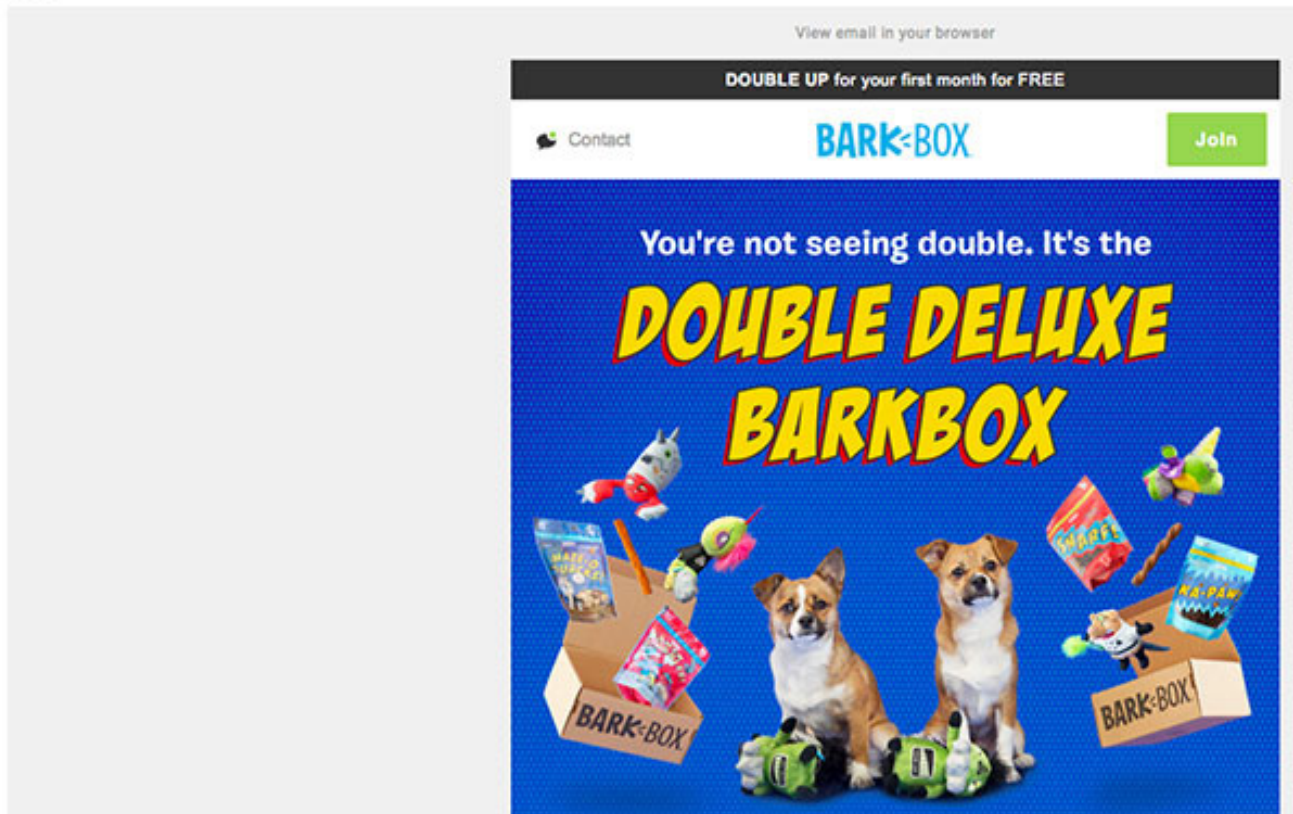
In other words, you must clearly state who you are (or who your company is) and not include any inaccurate information that could mislead someone.

For example, the sender information on any email campaigns I send say: "Rikke from Sleeknote."

Here's an example from [Barkbox](#):

The BarkBox so nice, we're offering it twice...

Scout from BarkBox <scout@woof.barkbox.com> unsubscribe  
to me ▾



Always have your emails come from an actual person and make sure your readers can reply to the email and get a quick response.

Add the sender in the signature of your email

Another way to increase credibility and click-through rates is to include the sender in the email signature.

Whether you're sending promotional emails, outreach emails, or any other type of email it's always a good idea to include the sender in the signature.

This will not only make your email more authentic and trustworthy, it will also increase chances of readers clicking through on your call-to-action.

Here's what my email signature looks like:

**Best Regards**

Rikke Thomsen

Head of Email Marketing, Sleeknote



**Sleeknote**

It has all the necessary information: My name, my title, the business I represent, and an image so people can put a face to the name.

## Preview Text: To Use Or Not To Use?

You should consider the preview text in your email as your supporting subject line.

Once your prospect's attention has been caught by your subject line, the preview text might be what convinces them to open your email or not.

But do you really need preview text? There's no definitive answer. It depends on the content of your email.

If you don't write preview text for your email, the first sentences of your email will appear as the preview text.

Here's an example from [Muuto](#) where no preview text has been written and the top elements in the email is shown:



Muuto Gift Inspiration for the Holidays Muuto Holiday Gift Inspiration Open email in your browser Visit muuto.com FURNITURE ACCESSORIES

As you can see the preview text doesn't make much sense because they're individual elements in the email and does not support the subject line in any way.


Here's another example from [Away](#) where no preview text was written, but where the top content in the email works great as preview text:

Away Don't leave without this **Still deciding? Don't wait forever. Keep shopping before you have to fly out—or we sell out.**

And the email content:

## Still deciding?

Don't wait forever. Keep shopping before you have to fly out—or we sell out.



**Item:** The Medium: Aluminum Edition

**Color:** Silver

**Qty:** 1

**Price:** €595.00

---

GET AWAY

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So, if the first sentences of your email doesn't support the subject line, you should consider writing specific preview text.

Also, if the top part of your email are images, you should also write custom preview text.



Here's an example from [Marc Jacobs](#) where the preview text has been customized:

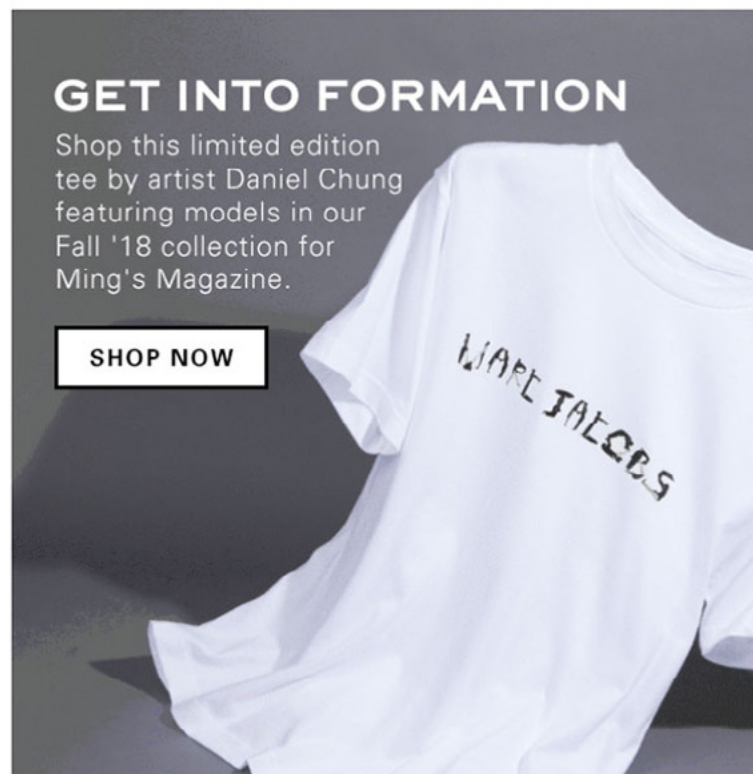
MARC JACOBS

Not Your Average Logo Tee

Take a closer look.

When you open the email, the top content is an image making the preview text necessary:

**MARC JACOBS**



Deciding whether or not to use preview text is something you have to evaluate for each email campaign you send.

# Write a Great CTA

Before going into the details of how you create a compelling email CTA for your emails, you need to understand why they're different.

The most obvious difference is that you have limited space to work with and there's no room for getting side-tracked.

Every word in your email is in some way part of your CTA, which is the hard part about email CTAs. Let's take a look at how you create an effective email CTA.

## Avoid the typical CTA copy

All the time I see CTA copy that reads: "Learn More", "Read Here", "Shop Now".

What do these CTAs tell me? Absolutely nothing.

A CTA is supposed to let the reader know exactly what happens when they click-through, and it has to be compelling.

You need to focus on the "What's in it for me?" when you write your email CTAs. What is the value people get when they click-through?

Here's a great example from [Chubbies](#):



Of course you do. Life is tiring.

[Do it in this shirt >](#)

[And these shorts >](#)

## Write a unique CTA for each email

Don't use the same CTA for all your emails.

If your emails always look the same, include the same type of content, and has the same CTA, your readers will grow tired of it and stop clicking through or even read your emails.

By changing your CTAs in every email, you keep it interesting and people are more likely to click-through.

Here's another example from Chubbies.

The purpose of the email is the same as most of the emails Chubbies send (get readers to buy), but they use different CTAs that are relevant to the individual email content.

## chubbies ALL THESE SHORTS ARE BACK



We restocked a bunch of the shorts on our site that we think you must like otherwise we wouldn't have had to restock them. So I grabbed our shorts maker- Steve- and I said Steve, fire up the loom. Lets get some more styles back for Labor Day. And he said yes.  
Thank you, Steve.

[Shop the restocked favorites >](#)

## Use Scarcity

One misconception with scarcity is that you need a good discount to get readers to act.

Wrong.

Scarcity focuses on consumers' fear of losing their freedom of choice.

Simply put, if a product isn't available, it suddenly becomes more attractive.

Here's an example of how to use scarcity in your emails from [Death Wish Coffee](#):

Hey there,

We figured we'd give you a shout to let you know that the 2-for-1 2017 Deneen Mug sets are nearly wiped out. If you'd like to get your hands on one of the last 2017 Death Wish mugs, now's the time to do it.

There are less than 1000 sets here: [deathwishcoffee.com/blackfriday](https://deathwishcoffee.com/blackfriday)

Reach out if you have any questions. Cheers!

Scarcity can be used to make your products seem more exclusive and desirable, which will, in turn, increase your click-through rates and email ROI.

# Use Images to Convey Meaning

By incorporating visuals into your email marketing, you have a greater chance of people reading your emails and completing the desired call-to-action.

In fact, humans process visuals [60,000 times faster than text](#), which is quite significant when you consider that you only have eight seconds to get your message across.

But visual marketing isn't just about adding an image or two to your emails.

The right visuals in the right emails can increase your email engagement significantly, but the wrong visuals in the wrong emails will do just the opposite and turn your readers off.

Include images that are informative and serve a purpose

Using visual elements in emails isn't for everyone, and it's about figuring out what works best for your business.

Product images are the most common type of visuals in e-commerce email marketing—and for good reason.

No one wants to buy a pair of shoes they've never seen, right?

But with so many marketers using product images in their emails, you need to figure out a way for your images to stand out.

One way of doing so is by showing your products in use.



Here's an example from [Crate&Barrel](#):

## Crate&Barrel

New | Furniture | Decor | Tabletop & Bar | Kitchen | Sale



Your products will look much more appealing when your prospects can imagine them in use.

## Hyperlink your images

When you use images in your email campaigns, you can hyperlink them with your call-to-action link. Your prospects might click an image of a product, and when they do, they should be redirected to that product on your site.

Here's an example from [Birchbox](#):

**BirchboxMan**

| HAIR                            | BODY      | SKINCARE       | BEARD | SALE |
|---------------------------------|-----------|----------------|-------|------|
| LOYALTY PROGRAM<br>Easy Rewards | SUBSCRIBE | POINTS BALANCE |       |      |

**LIMITED TIME OFFER**

### Stay Hydrated & Well-Groomed

Get your grooming on point with a monthly delivery of five personalized samples + score a **FREE 9oz. S'well Bottle** with your 6-month subscription.

**a \$25 Value**

**Use Code: WATERBOTTLE**



The entire image is linked, so when you click it, you go directly to the offer where you can use the promo code.

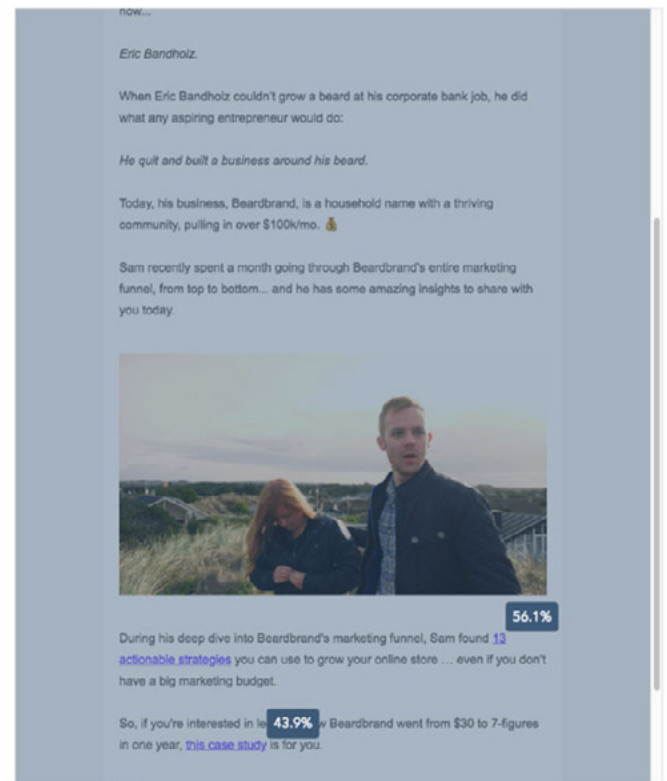
But be careful with hyperlinking all your images. In some cases, it can have a negative effect on your deliverability.

Some email providers will categorise your email as “promotional” or even spam if it has too many links.

Try to test if your audience clicks your email images. If they do, keep linking them. And if they don't, stop linking.

In [Hubspot](#), you can easily see where people click in your email with the HTML Click Map:

#### HTML click map ⓘ



# Refer a Friend

[One study by Nielsen](#) found that people are four times more likely to buy if they are referred by a friend.

According to [research by Texas Tech](#), while 83% of consumers are happy to recommend their favourite products, only 29% actually do.

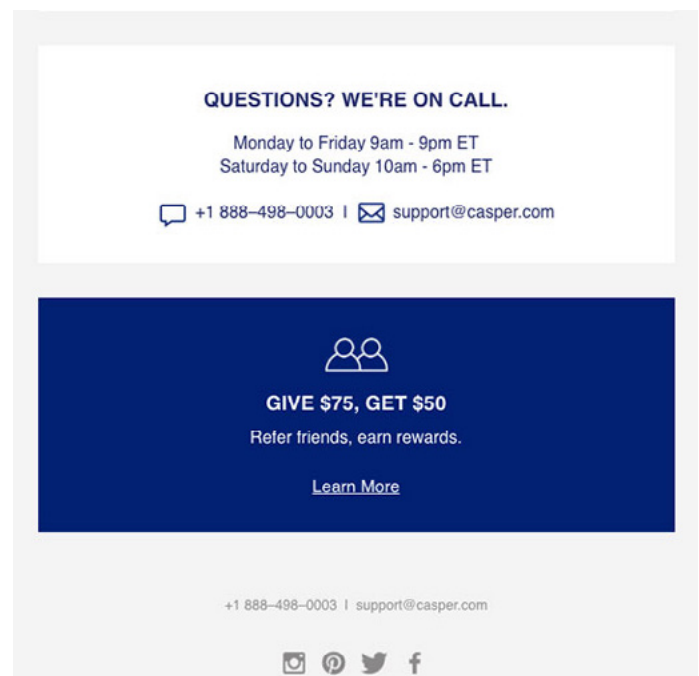
Even if you have a good product, you're missing out on a huge portion of potential referrals if you're just waiting for referrals to come in naturally—because they won't.

Having a referral strategy helps you encourage your satisfied customers to take action and recommend your products to friends who might benefit from them.

Simply include a call-to-action in your email and tell customers why they should refer friends.

What's in it for your customers and their friends?

Here's an example from [Casper](#):



Pro tip: You should try to include a referral option in your transactional emails.

You probably know the feeling:

You've just hit the "buy" button, and your order confirmation arrives in your inbox giving you a recap of the products you've just purchased.

You're feeling pretty good and excited about your new purchase, right?

This is the golden moment to ask for a referral.

Make it as easy as possible for customers to refer friends, and you'll have a solid referral engine in place.



## Add Social Sharing

Getting customers to follow you to your social media profiles is a huge win.

This provides you with another direct method of communication moving forward, which can establish more long-term relationships and present opportunities for you to cultivate user-generated content (UGC).

This can be as simple as putting a “Follow us on social” with different linked social icons at the bottom of your email.

Your social sharing options should never take focus from the main CTA in your email. Keep it subtle, and make it easy for people to share on your social channels.

If you want to focus on the UGC, you can include CTAs to reveal the “unboxing” experience, sharing a feed of other users doing so. By alerting customers that this is what you want ahead of time, it generates excitement and makes them more likely to do it, too. Here’s an example from Pipcorn:

The image shows an email marketing banner for Pipcorn. At the top, the Pipcorn logo is displayed with the tagline "DELICIOUS MINI POPCORN". Below the logo, the text "SALE EXTENDED" is written in large, bold, gold letters, followed by "TO WEDNESDAY DUE TO POPULAR DEMAND!". In the center, there is a photograph of a bag of Pipcorn Cheddar Delicious Mini Popcorn, with yellow sunburst lines radiating from it. Below the photo, the text "TAKE 35% OFF" is written in large, bold, gold letters, followed by "CHEDDAR PIPCORN WITH CODE: 35CHEDDAR". At the bottom of the banner, there is a black button with the text "SHOP NOW". Below the banner, there is a row of four social media icons: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram, all enclosed in a thin red border.

# Format for Different Devices & Clients

Crafting an effective email is only half the battle. It is equally important to make sure that your contacts can properly view your email no matter which device or email client they use.

## Optimise for mobile

It's likely that at least half of your contacts view emails on mobile. In order to optimise your email CTR, you'll want to ensure that your email displays properly on mobile, tablet, and desktop.

Follow [these three tips](#) to create emails that look their best, no matter on what device your email is viewed:

1. Reduce the file size of your images to ensure a faster download speed on mobile devices which tends to have slower download speeds. Images uploaded to HubSpot's software are automatically compressed. Other tools like [TinyPNG](#) will help you reduce file size.
2. Ensure the CTA buttons and links are larger than 45-57 pixels for the best user experience. Why? [According to an MIT study](#), the average size of an adult index finger is 1.6-2 cm, which translates to 45-57 pixels on a mobile device.
3. Invest in responsive email templates. Creating your own responsive template may be beyond your particular skill set or bandwidth. Sometimes, the best solution is to license or buy email templates from the people who do it best.

## Optimise for different email clients

It's not only important to optimise for mobile. Your emails will also be viewed on a range of providers, including Google, Yahoo, Apple Mail, and more.

To ensure your email looks its best on all types of email providers, invest in responsive templates that automatically reformat your email depending on the device and provider that it's shown on. To learn how to create effective email templates with HubSpot, check out this [customer success story](#).

When you're ready to hit "Send" on your email, make a habit of double-checking if your emails look the way you want them to on all the different email clients.

Use your [email marketing tool](#) to preview what your email looks like in different email clients and devices that are popular with your audience.

You should also send out a test version of your email before you send your email to your entire list to ensure it's working properly for everyone on your email list.

Start incorporating these as final steps in your email review process.



# Send Your Email at the Optimal Time

If you've ever done any research on this, you'll know that there have been several studies performed to find the optimal email send time—both the day of the week and time of the day.

There's just one problem.

Some of the data is contradictory.

Some say it's Thursday at 10 am, others say it's Tuesday at 11 am, and so on.

But at the end of the day, every email campaign is a little different.

So what works brilliantly for one brand may only have limited results for your brand.

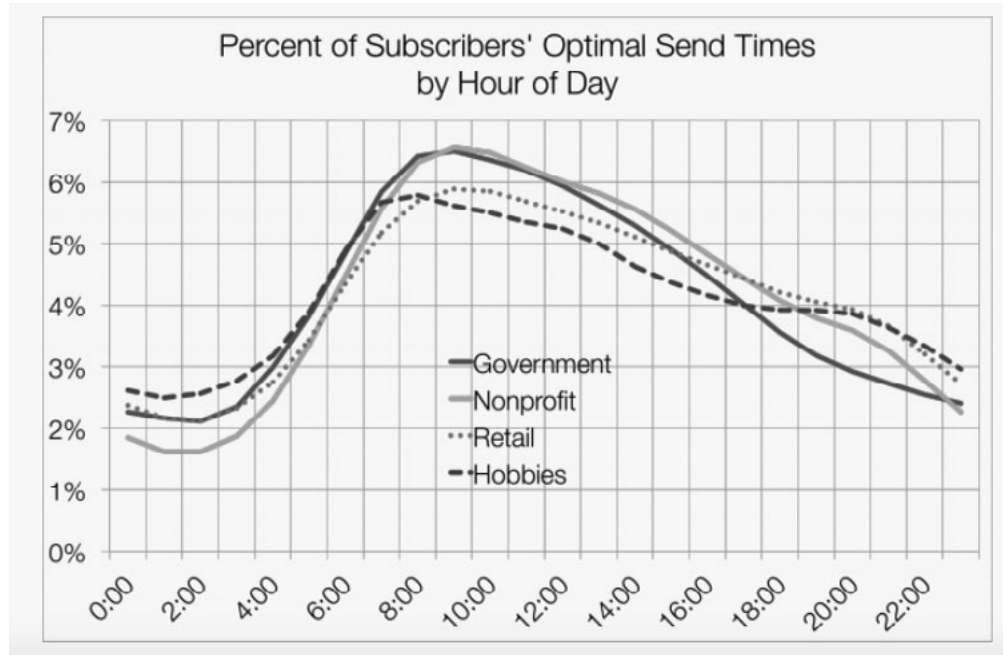
The most effective way to go about this is to do some A/B testing to see what works best for you.

[HubSpot recommends](#) that you have at least 1,000 recipients total.

So group A would need to consist of at least 500 recipients, and group B would have the same.

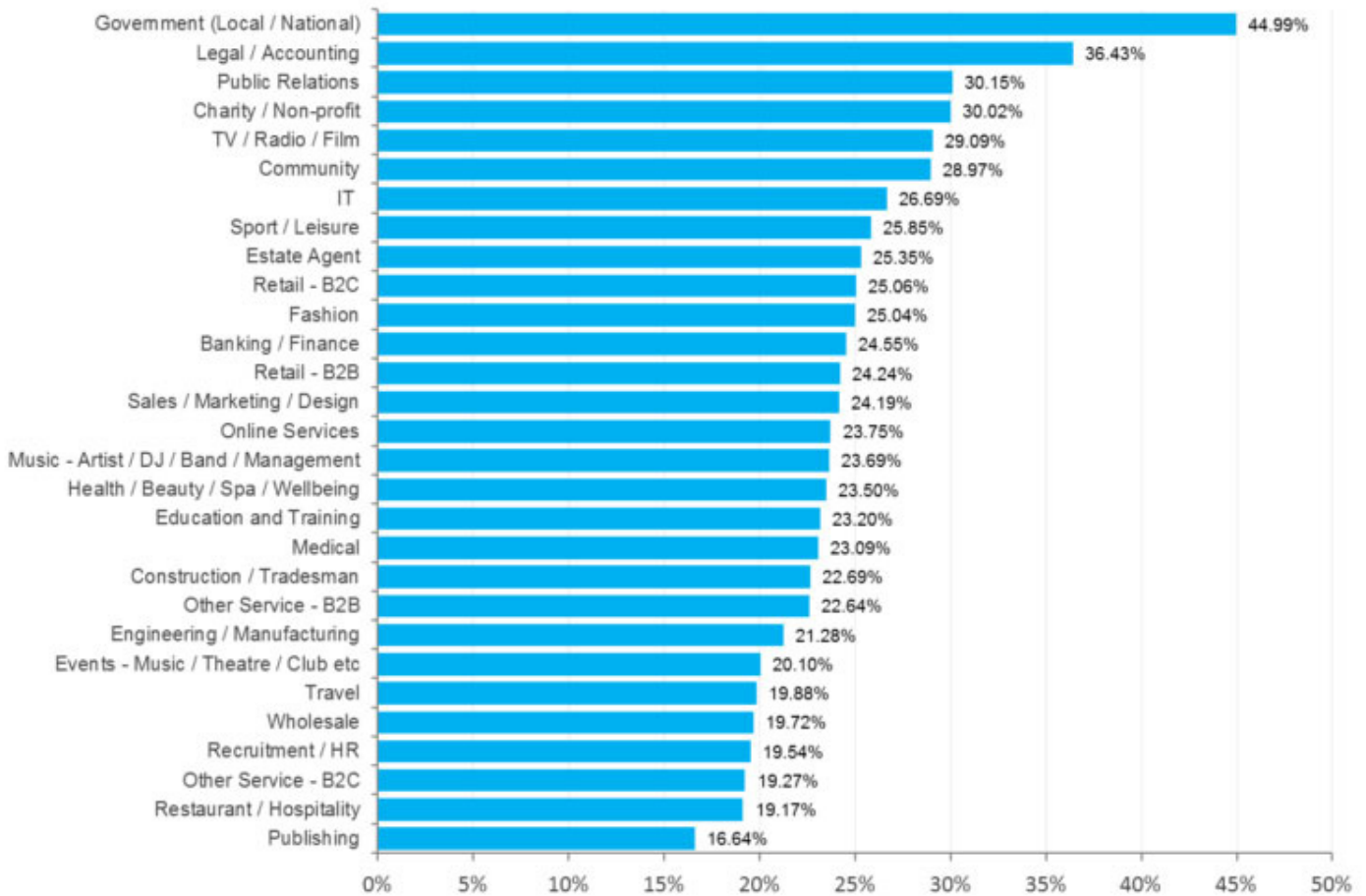
## Consider your industry

Optimal send times [vary by industry...](#)



The differences aren't too big but they definitely prove that it's important to do some of your own testing to find the sweet spot for your industry.

Open rates also vary by industry, so it's a good idea to know your industry average when analyzing the results of your tests.



## Pick the right day

To find the right day to send your emails, you need to send emails on different days of the week but at the same time of day.

For instance, it would make sense to schedule your first emails to go out on a Tuesday at 10 am—that would be group A.

If you're happy with the results, you may want to stick with sending emails on Tuesdays at 10 am.

But regardless, you should still complete your A/B testing by scheduling another batch of emails at a different day, same time, for group B to see if there's any improvement.

I would suggest sending them on a Thursday at 10 am to see how big a difference it makes.

Needless to say, you'll want to go with the one that has the higher open rate.

### Send at the right time

When deciding exactly what time of day for your additional tests, it's important that you put yourself in your subscribers' shoes.

Think about what a typical day would look like for your ideal buyer.

- What do they do for a living?
- What time do they wake up?
- What time do they go to bed?
- When are they most likely to check their email?
- Is there any period of downtime during the day when they would be more likely to check their email?

This should dictate the specifics of your A/B test.

Again, both tests should be sent on the same day, but at different times. The highest open rate typically happens around [10 to 11 am](#), so you may want to perform an initial test to see how big of a difference it makes by sending emails at those two times.

Is the open rate noticeably higher for one-time slot than the other? If so, that's what you'll want to stick with.

You should of course run more than one test to find the optimal send time for your emails.

# Conclusion

There you have it.

With this 10-step guide, you're all set with the tools you need to improve your email click-through rate.

Don't let your efforts stop here. The key to seeing continual improvement of your email click-through rate is to test your efforts over time.

Not every email database performs the same way. Use [A/B testing](#) to try out different ideas. Change the email CTA, test using images in the email header, send your emails at different times and track performance. Over time, you'll see trends that will tell you what works and what doesn't for your audience.

Most of all, don't let your email marketing become static. Change up your emails with different copy, new CTAs, and unique purposes to keep your audience interested and engaged with every email.

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