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GUIDE TO

EMAIL
MARKETING

GUIDE TO EMAIL MARKETING

Whether email plays a key role or a bit part in your marketing strategy, you're most likely doing it all yourself; an all-time high of 90% of companies now carry out their own email marketing. That's because email is a relatively cheap and very effective marketing medium – particularly in the hospitality sector. But getting it right isn't easy. Effective email marketing requires planning, strategic analysis, creativity and the right tools.

So to help you navigate this complex journey, we've created this guide, combining Melt Content's expertise in content marketing with Revinate's powerful technology. We'll cover the why, when and how of running a great email marketing campaign that uses content to generate sales, and how to use data to keep performing better.

What to expect from this guide

If email already plays a big role in your marketing efforts then we salute you; in this guide you'll find practical advice and information to help you further develop your strategy and execute it to even greater effect, from targeting your campaigns with data to writing subject lines.

And if you're not already prioritising email in your marketing efforts then you'll find information and insights on just why email marketing should be a key part of your strategy, and how it can help you retain customers and convert new ones.

Our aim is to help you maximise revenue and increase your guests' satisfaction through your email marketing, so this guide focuses on practical, easy-to-implement steps to help you get the most from your email activities. We hope you enjoy it and if you have any questions or comments then we'd love to hear from you.

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Why you need email marketing

Every couple of years marketing pundits declare alternately that email is dead, then that it's alive and kicking. So we'll draw a line under the debate: email is here to stay and it should be a core part of your marketing. Email marketing generates conversions and it's one of the cheapest ways to reach qualified customers. If you're conducting your email campaigns in-house, then with a little time and effort spent learning some best practices you can get a big return on a little investment – figures from the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) give the current average ROI of email as £38 (USD $47) for every £1 spent, or 3,800%.

Email conversion rates are also three times higher than social media, with a 17% higher value in each conversion .

So as a reliable channel with consistent return, email must be a key part of your marketing efforts. But as with any marketing activity, you can't just hit and hope; above all, the key to success with email marketing is a well-developed strategy.

Coming up with a strategy

Any time you create content you must start with why you're creating it. To succeed with email marketing you need to set out with a clear vision of how it contributes to specific business goals. In other words, you need a strategy.

Coming up with a strategy can seem daunting, but the basics are easy to understand. Your strategy is simply the set of goals, ideas, tasks and deliverables that shape and steer your campaign. It tells you who you're trying to reach, what you intend to reach them with and what steps you need to take to make it all happen.

The following are the building blocks of an email marketing strategy:

- Insight (data: who, why and when)
- Theme (your message)
- Content (how you convey it; i.e. the email)

Combine these successfully and you've got yourself a strong email marketing campaign.

Setting goals

Generating revenue is the end goal, but setting instrumental goals that are more specific can help you get there more quickly. Do you want to reactivate lapsed loyalty programme members? Perhaps you want to use email to help boost your social media presence. Identifying a clear objective based on analysis of your wider business goals will help you come up with a campaign and a message that really work.

The importance of data

A guest's email address acts as their digital passport and there's a huge amount of information that you can attach to it – basic demographic data, but also stay history, transactions, preferences, social media data and more. This is vital not just for targeting existing customers, but also for categorising your guests, identifying target segments and finding more people like them. Research shows that targeted communications generate 58% of all revenue from email marketing.
Blanket emails can still give results – but once again, they're more effective if you use data to inform what you communicate and when you send it.

You'll have a wealth of data on your customers that can help you target your emails, and your campaign will get you even more data to help refine the next one. Using that data results in more effective campaigns because it takes the guesswork out your marketing efforts, allowing you to set measurable goals and make informed decisions on what you say and when you say it.

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THE FIVE PILLARS OF EMAIL

Melt Content's five-stage Email Marketing Framework (EMF) was designed to help steer businesses through the process of formulating and deploying an email strategy.

At the heart of the framework is a single guiding concept: **'Motivation'**. In most cases this will be a customer goal linked with a business goal. For instance, you might want to help guests to celebrate special occasions (customer goal) by upselling spa packages and tasting menus (business goal).

With Motivation as a foundation, the framework moves through key **data segments** and **basic strategies**, helping you plan out a calendar of targeted activity with clear goals. Finally, it looks at the essentials of **preparing emails** and **tracking performance**.

How to use the EMF

1. Motivation: Formulating your guiding idea sounds easy, but it's one of the trickiest parts of the process – and the most important. You'll often find that one side of the equation comes easier: for instance, you might have an obvious business goal but no sense of how it links up to customer goals. Before moving forward, you need a clear sense of who you're trying to target, what you want them to do, and what success looks like from a commercial point of view.
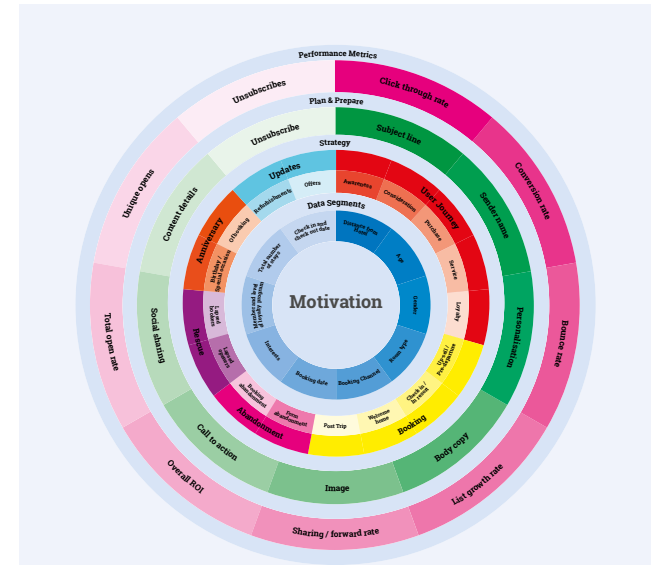
The EMF Wheel: Our wheel graphic (see p7) shows how Motivation sits at the heart of the process. There are countless potential paths through the wheel, and you might use several to achieve a single core goal.
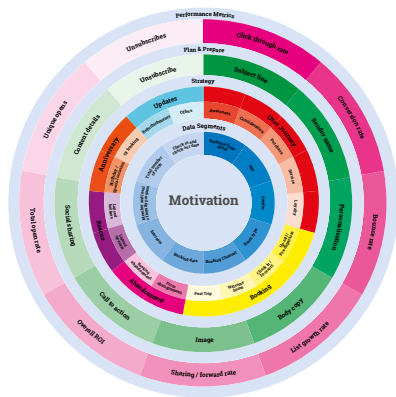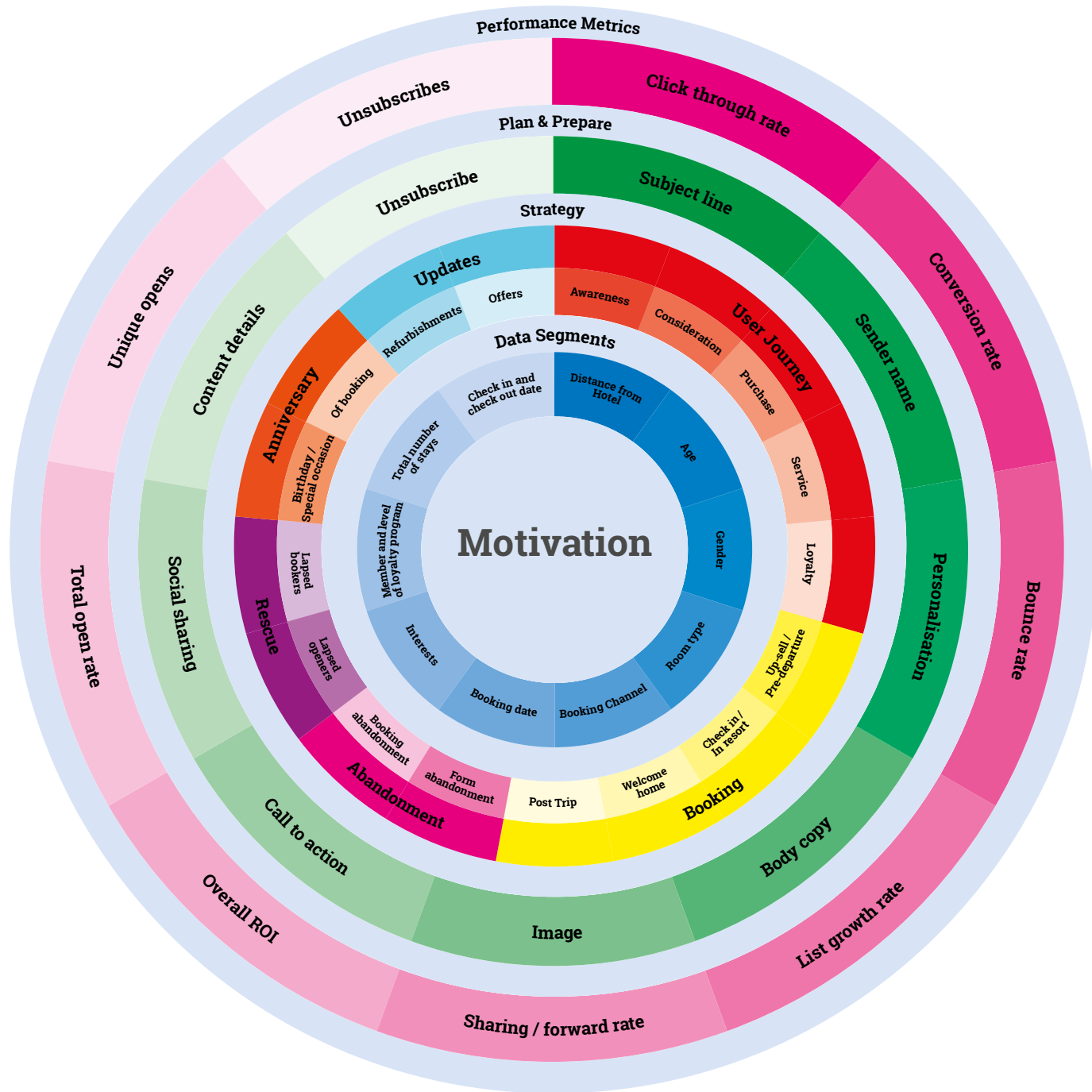
2. Data segments: With Motivation figured out, it's tempting to jump straight into creative. While it doesn't hurt to have some ideas, we've designed the EMF to focus on data first. Reviewing the data segments at your disposal lets you go into the creative process with a better idea of who you can target and how precisely. You'll need to do some simple auditing here too – you need to select segments with enough current, accurate data behind them to meet your goals. Depending on how granular your customer profile is, you can use data segments alone (e.g. customers under 40 years old) or in combination (e.g. female customers under 40 years old who book direct and enjoy sports).

3. Strategy: Now that you understand who you want to reach and how you can target them, it's time to think about the type of email you want to send. The EMF's checklist isn't exhaustive, but it covers some of the key categories to consider, from straightforward property updates to booking abandonment emails. Again, you can use these strategies in combination to meet your goals. Returning to our restaurant example, you might hit foodie customers with a simple property update email, and customers who have abandoned a booking with a reminder message, sweetened with details of your new menu. Different strategies, different data, same core Motivation.

4. Plan & prepare: With everything in place, it's time to start putting your emails together. Headlines, copy and images are the obvious elements – and we've covered some aspects of them already in this guide – but you should also consider personalization options, social sharing buttons and calls to action (CTAs). It's surprisingly easy to put all your effort into sparkling body copy and forget about the all-important 'What next?'. CTAs should be clear, concise and visually striking.

5. Performance metrics: The final segment of the EMF wheel gives a checklist of key performance metrics for email. Depending on your goals and strategy, you may want to focus on one or more metrics – for instance, conversion rate for sales-focused emails, or sharing/forward rate for awareness-focused emails. It's important to look at see metrics as more than an indication of success or failure. Instead, treat them as actionable feedback. You should be checking them regularly, and using their cues to dip back into the EMF and tweak your activity.

We hope you find the EMF useful. You can find an accompanying Content Marketing Framework at meltcontent.com/EMF.

Email Marketing Wheel

Motivation (center)

Data Segments
- Distance from Hotel
- Age
- Gender
- Room type
- Booking Channel
- Booking date
- Interests
- Member and level of loyalty program
- Total number of stays
- Check in and check out date

User Journey
- Awareness
- Consideration
- Purchase
- Service
- Loyalty
- Up-sell / Pre-departure
- Check in / In resort
- Welcome home
- Post Trip
- Booking
- Form abandonment
- Booking abandonment
- Abandonment

Strategy
- Lapsed openers
- Lapsed bookers
- Rescue
- Birthday / Special occasion
- Of booking
- Anniversary
- Refurbishments
- Offers
- Updates
- Unsubscribe

Plan & Prepare
- Subject line
- Sender name
- Personalisation
- Body copy
- Image
- Call to action

Performance Metrics
- Click through rate
- Conversion rate
- Bounce rate
- List growth rate
- Sharing / forward rate
- Overall ROI
- Total open rate
- Social sharing
- Unique opens
- Content details
- Unsubscribes

WHY AND WHEN TO EMAIL

The starting point for an email campaign is the theme. Generally there are two ways to determine this:

1. External: use insights from your customer data to decide on a theme
2. Internal: base your campaign on an internally-driven theme (e.g. a new restaurant opening) and use data to target it; this includes seasonal opportunities

The most basic premise is to use common sense, and only send recipients content that is going to interest them. It's not just about sending the right content, too; making sure you don't send the wrong content is just as important. Nothing irritates and alienates guests more than being bombarded with irrelevant information – and that's if it makes it through their email client's spam filter. Valentine's Day special? Leave out the elderly guest who always stays in a single room. Doing a group booking offer? Target guests who regularly travel in groups! Bottom line: if you're not carefully targeting and tailoring your email then there's a good chance you're spamming your guests and driving them away.

Externally-driven themes

These are themes that you can come up with from data that you've collected on your guests - i.e. external factors. This could be a post-trip email, for example, or an anniversary message to the newlyweds that stayed with you last year.

Tip:

Create an email schedule. Like all successful campaigns, a great email marketing program begins with a plan. Create a schedule with themed emails so your subscribers get in the habit of receiving content.

Internally-driven themes

These are themes that you have control over and come from your own activities and operations. It could be the opening of a new health club, for example. In this case, you'd use your customer data to target guests who have used gym or spa facilities in the past, or who have an interest in sport or wellness.

Timing is everything

So you've got a theme – you know who you're emailing and why. The next step is deciding when. This can be a simple case of common sense. Every year companies send out Valentine's promotions on 14th February – when it's too late for most customers to do take advantage of them; plan well in advance and start your romance-themed promo in January, scheduling a follow-up email before the Valentine's weekend.

Customer data is also a goldmine for choosing the right time for email contact. By filtering for transaction data or social activity, to name just two, you can target customers with communications personalised to their stage of the purchasing journey. Broadly speaking, in travel this progresses from dreaming about the trip to researching it, before booking; this is followed by another research stage before the in-destination experience, and finally post-trip.

Paying attention to where your customer is in their journey is important in segmenting your campaigns; a guest who's currently staying with you on their annual July trip probably doesn't want to hear about August offers.

Tip:

Use both seasonality and customer data to tailor the timing of your email activity.

How often should I email?

Alongside the when of email it's also important to consider how often. Email straddles the line between interruption- and permission-based marketing so it's important to get the right balance. Email a guest too often and they'll feel bombarded and might unsubscribe; too little contact and you risk being forgotten.

Firstly you should only email a customer when you have a meaningful message and you're confident that they'll be interested in it. Your confidence should be based on data rather than a hunch. Then adopt a test-and-learn approach – track the user data on your emails to see if your confidence was well-placed and your customers really are interested in what you have to say (more on this later in the Tracking and measurement section).

Investing time to create good content

That magic figure of 3,800% ROI isn't a given. It's a mean taken from a range of campaigns – good and bad. For all the companies reaping the rewards of email marketing there are still plenty hitting and hoping, sending emails without following best practice. So with a clear strategy in place you're one step towards some serious net gains. You know who you're going to email, why you're targeting them and when, and what you want to say. The next step is figuring out exactly how you want to say it – executing your campaign by writing a great email.
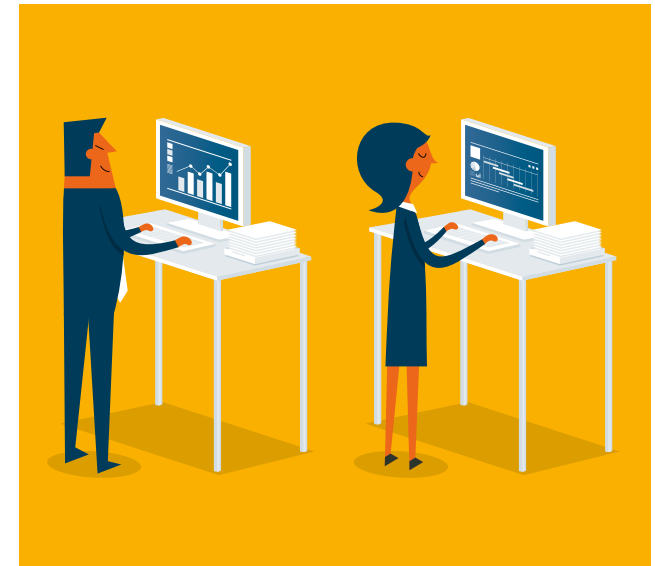
> " *You should only email a customer when you have a meaningful message and you're confident that they'll be interested in it.*

HOW TO WRITE GREAT EMAILS

Now the hard part – writing a great email. Communicating your value proposition in easily understood language is no mean feat. Using words to build trust and a genuine relationship with your customers isn't easy, but by following some basic rules of thumb email is a great medium to get your message across in a way that really speaks to your customers. To help you write the best emails possible we're providing some guidelines and a few examples of what a good email looks like, with tips that you can put into practice on your next campaign.

The basics

There are a few basics when it comes to writing a great email:

- A relevant, meaningful message
- A compelling subject line
- Engaging body text
- Use of visual content
- A clear call to action (CTA)

Covering each of these bases sets you up for a good chance of success. It's important to implement them with good editorial practice, good design and good technical practice.

> " *Using words to build trust and a genuine relationship with your customers isn't easy, but by following some basic rules of thumb email is a great medium to get your message across.*

Editorial practice

Before you send out anything, give it at least two editorial passes. That means the person who writes the email should get a second edit from someone else, with a final proof either by the writer or – ideally – a third pair of eyes. Edit the first time for style, making sure that your work conforms to any brand guidelines, style guides or tone of voice documents you have. Eliminate any typos, grammatical errors and formatting problems – professional, easy-to-read communications demonstrate a professional brand and reliable service.

Technical practice

Ensure mobile readiness: most email opens happen on a mobile device, so email is now generally a mobile-first medium . Usually your email program or provider will take care of most of the tricky parts here, but if you're starting out then make sure that you've tested your templates.

Tip:

Implement a defined editorial process to ensure quality content; this doesn't have to get in the way of your work - a good process should make you more efficient and more effective.

Example Email: Birthday

Why write it

It's an opportunity to reach out customers outside the context of a specific trip or a hotel update. Recognising a birthday is a nice personal touch, and the 'gift' of an unexpected offer can boost goodwill as well as prompting new bookings.

Tip:

Keep it brief. Tease a few details to build interest and build traffic by encouraging guests to find out more.
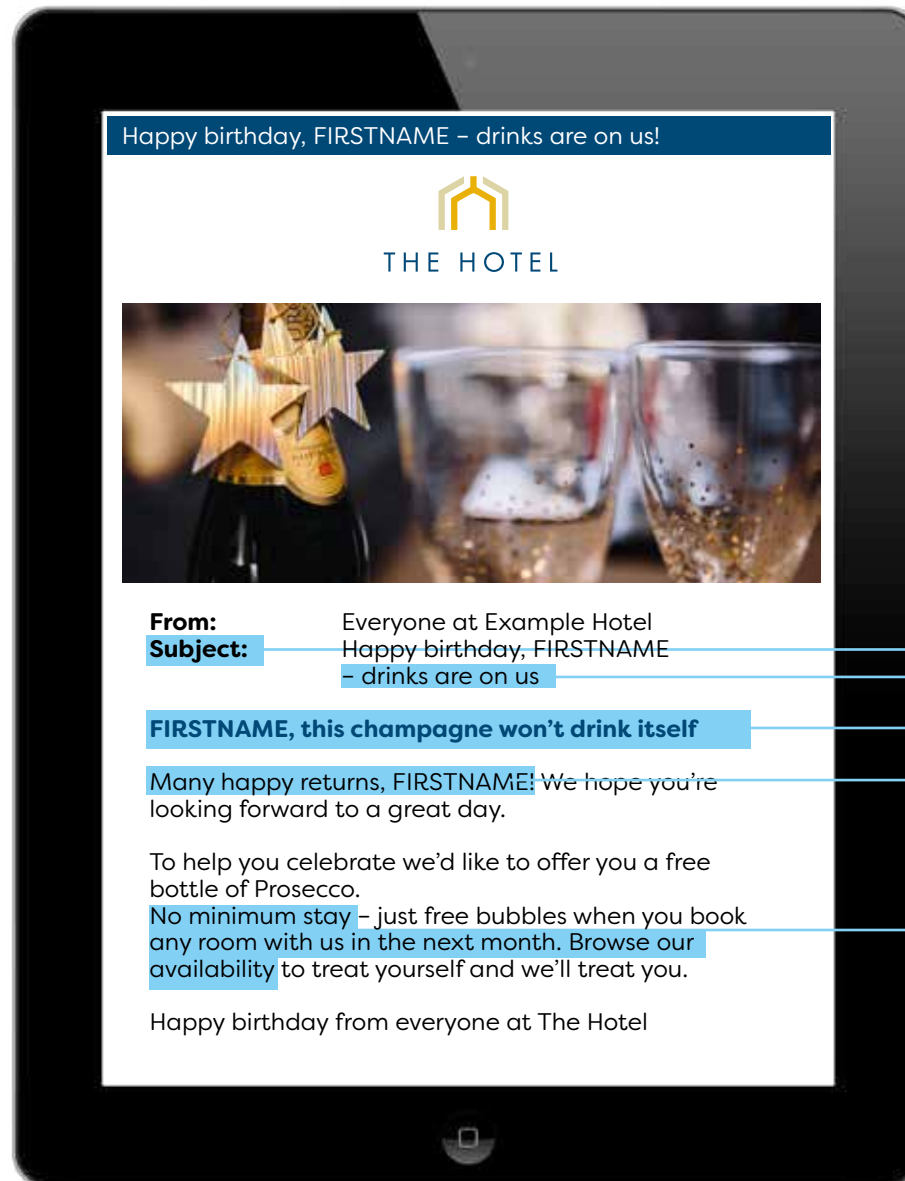
Happy birthday, FIRSTNAME – drinks are on us!

THE HOTEL

From: Everyone at Example Hotel
Subject: Happy birthday, FIRSTNAME – drinks are on us

FIRSTNAME, this champagne won't drink itself

Many happy returns, FIRSTNAME! We hope you're looking forward to a great day.

To help you celebrate we'd like to offer you a free bottle of Prosecco. No minimum stay – just free bubbles when you book any room with us in the next month. Browse our availability to treat yourself and we'll treat you.

Happy birthday from everyone at The Hotel

Consensus is that 50 characters is the optimum length for getting your message across while making sure it's not cut off by the limitations of your readers' email client.

Some email clients will cut off subject lines at 35 characters but you can always front-load your subject line so that the most important text is at the beginning.

Revinate can give you data on which email clients your guests are using (e.g. Gmail, iPhone, Outlook 2010) – have a look and tailor your subject line length appropriately.

This alternative subject line works if your brand allows for a little cheekiness – subject lines can say a lot about your personality in a few characters

Resist the urge to claim that there's 'no catch' with an offer unless it's completely true

It's important to make the terms of the offer completely transparent – you can choose to omit details and reveal them later, but this risks irritating your customer if you present a prohibitive catch at the last moment
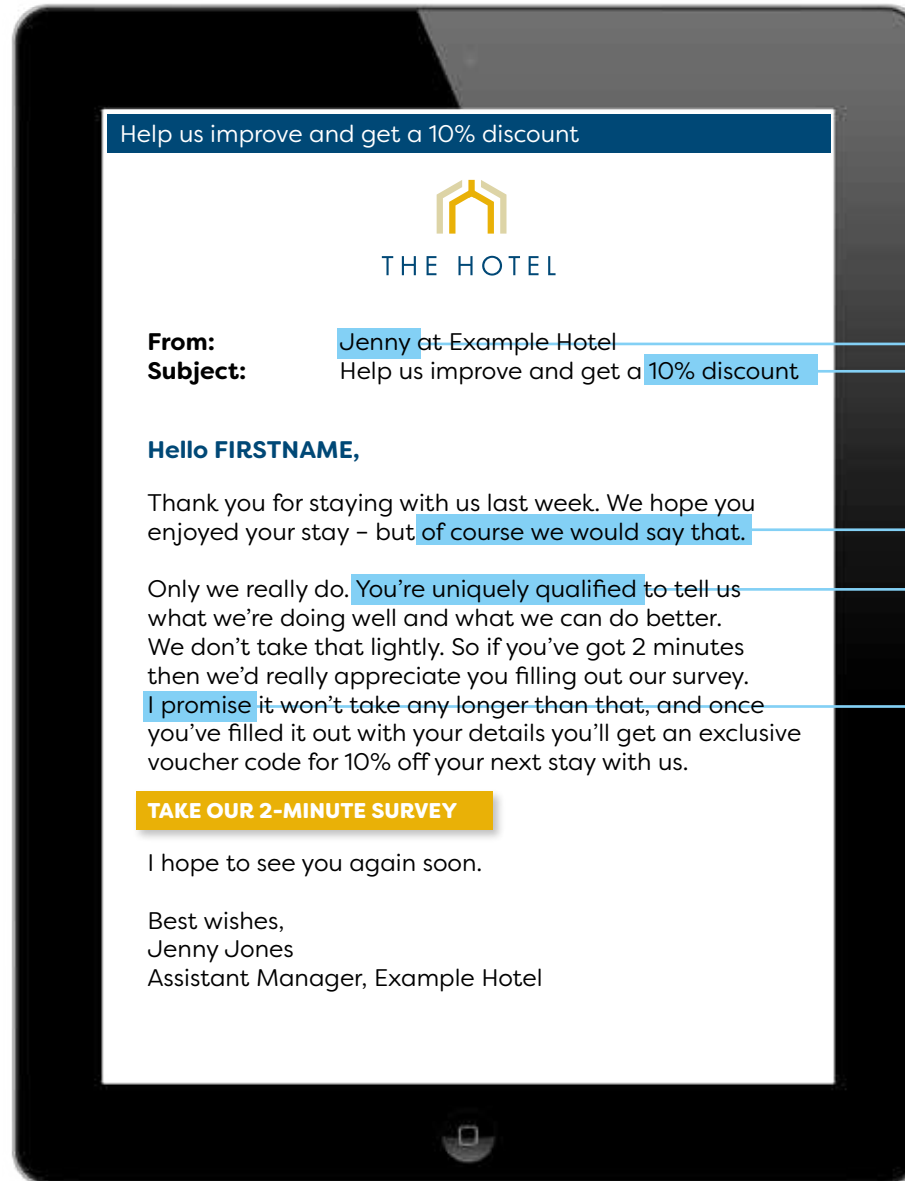
Include a clear CTA

Example Email: Post trip

Why write it

Post-trip emails are a chance to build customer loyalty by reminding your customer that you have a relationship beyond their stay. They're a simple way to increase awareness, but you have to offer the customer some value to avoid sending them an irrelevant email.

Tip:

When your goal is to drive your guests to an action, shorter is better. As you write, keep in mind that every second wasted on words that don't need to be there puts the success of your surveys at risk. To craft your best email, write down what you want to say, and then rewrite it until it's as clear and concise as possible.

Help us improve and get a 10% discount

THE HOTEL

From: Jenny at Example Hotel
Subject: Help us improve and get a 10% discount

Hello FIRSTNAME,

Thank you for staying with us last week. We hope you enjoyed your stay – but of course we would say that.

Only we really do. You're uniquely qualified to tell us what we're doing well and what we can do better. We don't take that lightly. So if you've got 2 minutes then we'd really appreciate you filling out our survey. I promise it won't take any longer than that, and once you've filled it out with your details you'll get an exclusive voucher code for 10% off your next stay with us.

TAKE OUR 2-MINUTE SURVEY

I hope to see you again soon.

Best wishes,
Jenny Jones
Assistant Manager, Example Hotel

Ideally make this someone who has frequent contact with guests so there's a chance that readers will recognise the name – for example, a memorable member of front desk staff

The offer or prize is arbitrary; it could be an automatic 10% discount or entry into a draw to win a free stay. The important thing is to quantify the discount so that it's worth the guest's while to open the email.

On one hand it's important to thank your guests and show that you appreciate their custom. On the other, it's hard to that without resorting to platitudes. Acknowledging this grabs the reader's interest with this unexpected insight. Breaking the paragraph entices them further and introduces the next idea: the survey.

This establishes a personal connection with the guest and reminds them of their importance to you.

Using the first person further personalises the communication so the reader is more likely to believe that it will really only take 2 minutes.
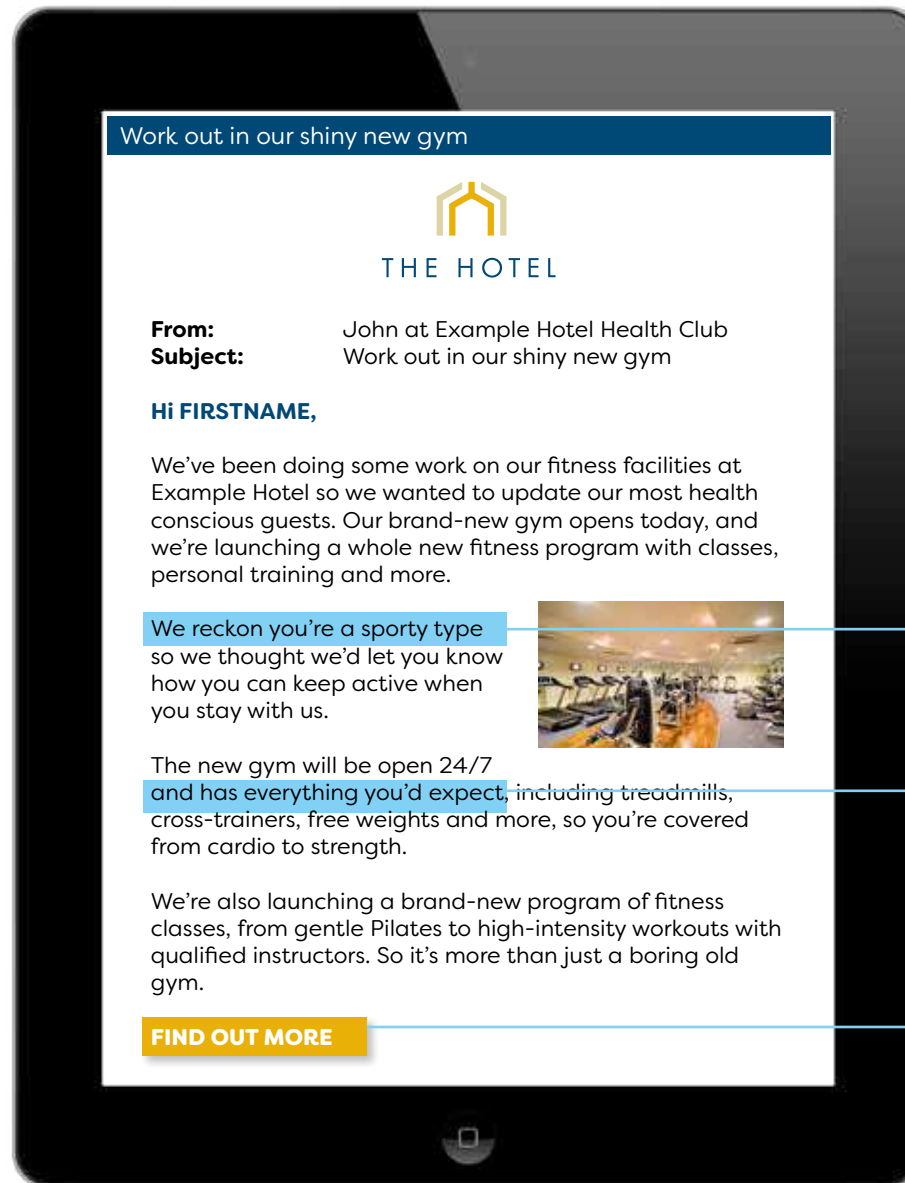
Example Email: Refurbishment update

Why write it

Keeping customers informed of new developments can boost awareness and give them a reason to book a stay. But, as always, only if it's relevant to them. Segmentation is key here; for this example you'll likely have plenty of data on use of your fitness or spa facilities.

Tip:

Practice writing in an active voice. Passive: Our property was remodeled. Active: We've remodeled our property. Check out our brand new look!

Work out in our shiny new gym

THE HOTEL

From: John at Example Hotel Health Club
Subject: Work out in our shiny new gym

Hi FIRSTNAME,

We've been doing some work on our fitness facilities at Example Hotel so we wanted to update our most health conscious guests. Our brand-new gym opens today, and we're launching a whole new fitness program with classes, personal training and more.

We reckon you're a sporty type so we thought we'd let you know how you can keep active when you stay with us.

The new gym will be open 24/7 and has everything you'd expect, including treadmills, cross-trainers, free weights and more, so you're covered from cardio to strength.

We're also launching a brand-new program of fitness classes, from gentle Pilates to high-intensity workouts with qualified instructors. So it's more than just a boring old gym.

FIND OUT MORE

The email is a general update, rather than a personalised communication – but that doesn't mean you can't establish a personal connection. Show the guest you've paid attention to make them feel more valued. A friendly, down-to-earth tone of voice helps reinforce this.

Anticipate what guests want to know; when writing your email, ask yourself what kinds of questions guests might ask. In this case, 'what are the opening hours?', 'what equipment is there?'

The body copy is informative enough to be worth reading but does not provide full details – include a button or clickable banner to drive traffic. This could link to a page that may have a booking module or encourages further interaction.
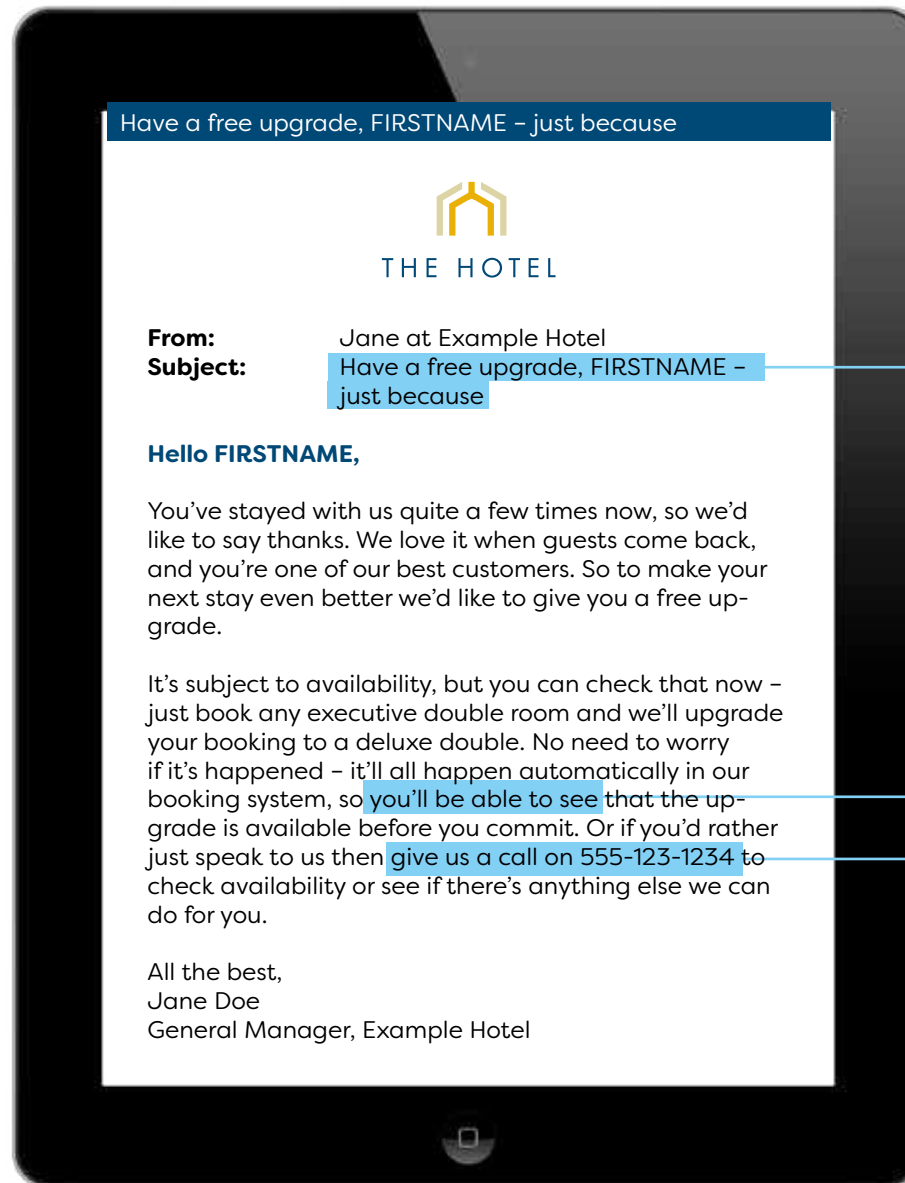
Example Email: Repeat customer offer

Why write it

Rewarding a repeat or loyal customer helps further build their loyalty. And by offering an upgrade or other value-add you strengthen loyalty through genuine reward rather than discounted rates, which can encourage guests to make booking decisions based on price rather than your brand.

Tip:

Make the terms of your offer clear – if availability is limited, say so and anticipate guests' queries or scepticism. How does the offer work? How will I know if the discount has been applied?

Have a free upgrade, FIRSTNAME – just because

THE HOTEL

From: Jane at Example Hotel
Subject: Have a free upgrade, FIRSTNAME – just because

Hello FIRSTNAME,

You've stayed with us quite a few times now, so we'd like to say thanks. We love it when guests come back, and you're one of our best customers. So to make your next stay even better we'd like to give you a free upgrade.

It's subject to availability, but you can check that now – just book any executive double room and we'll upgrade your booking to a deluxe double. No need to worry if it's happened – it'll all happen automatically in our booking system, so you'll be able to see that the upgrade is available before you commit. Or if you'd rather just speak to us then give us a call on 555-123-1234 to check availability or see if there's anything else we can do for you.

All the best,
Jane Doe
General Manager, Example Hotel

'Free' is a powerful word in marketing, but it can arouse suspicion – particularly in email marketing, where many customers are used to spam offers. So a little extra like this makes it clear that there's no catch and injects some personality

Spell out how an offer such as this works; if the guest thinks there could be any hassle involved then they won't bother. Reassure them, give them the information they need and make it as easy as possible.

This is an extra call to action that not only reassures the guest and stresses your customer service, but also adds another way to drive the guest down the conversion funnel and make the sale

TRACKING AND MEASUREMENT

Despite being the oldest form of digital communication still in use, email even remains the top source of data for marketing analytics . If you're new to email marketing then you'd be surprised at just how much information you can gather and how much data you can track. And keeping track of user metrics is vital to gauging the ROI of your email marketing and developing your strategy.

In short, tracking user metrics is your way of seeing what's working and what's not working – and figuring out why. This helps you to tweak your practice as you go – after all, your strategy shouldn't be static; you need scope to adapt it as you go.

Here's a rundown of some of the key metrics that can help you track the performance of your campaigns and ensure the success of future ones:

Total opens

Open rate is a good barometer of your subject line and the overall theme of your campaign. If no one is opening your emails then it could either be down to an uninteresting subject line or simply unappealing subject matter. Likewise, lots of opens indicates a well-written subject line and a compelling offer, suggesting you should keep doing what you're doing.

Unique opens

Bear in mind that your total opens figure could include multiple opens by one user. Unique opens gives a reliable view of how many people are opening your email.

Bounce rate

A high bounce rate can be a result of the way that you've built your list, or simply lack of maintenance. If you're over 3% then you probably need to do some cleaning.

Click rate

You can draw all kinds of inferences from the click rate of the links in your emails. If users are interacting with visual content but not clicking links in text-heavy emails then consider more images and videos.

Email client

This has a bearing on your email design: if most of your guests are opening your messages in Gmail then bear in mind its 50-character subject line limit. If more are using the iPhone mail client then optimise your content accordingly.

Device used

This can influence your wider content strategy: you might have written a great email with engaging content and enticing links, but if 60% of your guests are opening emails on mobile devices and your links point to a non-responsive site then you'll see your hard work will be going to waste.

Unsubscribe rate

An unsubscribe is the ultimate 'no thanks'. A high unsubscribe rate on a campaign is a reliable indicator that you need to change something. You can usually find a significant difference between an unsuccessful campaign and a strong one; if you encounter a lot of unsubscribes then look for the main point of difference and learn from it. A deeper dive into some customer data can show you whether it's the content or just your segmentation – it could be a great campaign that's just not appropriate for certain guests.

Conversion rate

Conversion is the end goal, after all. Looking at your conversion rate in conjunction with other metrics can you give a good picture of how your guests are perceiving your emails. A low conversion rate alongside great figures for everything else could suggest that you just don't have a clear enough call to action.

EMAIL CHECKLIST

Finally, here's a handy checklist to run through before you hit *send*:

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○ You have checked the content at least twice for grammar, spelling and formatting errors

○ All the information in the email is accurate; i.e. phone number, address, etc.

○ The message is clear and can be absorbed within the first three seconds of reading.

○ The copy is written in concise sentences or bullet points

○ The overall design is uncluttered and leaves a lot of white space

○ The call to action (CTA) is powerful, descriptive and clear – there is a compelling reason to act now

○ The CTA link leads to a landing page that matches the email but expands on the message

○ Links are clearly identifiable as links

○ You've clicked every single link and checked that each one leads to the correct page

○ In the case that the images don't download, subscribers can still make sense of the email

○ Alt-text is used for images

○ The image supports the main message and offer

○ The email is consistent with the brand in tone of voice, colour and design

○ The offer and content match the subject line

○ The subject line is descriptive, compelling and less than 40 characters

○ The subject line is personalised and/or localised

○ You have selected the correct "from" address and it is easily identifiable to the reader

○ The database is segmented and the message is targeted to the specific audience

○ Delivery is scheduled for a time when the email is most likely to be opened

○ A render test is done and the email displays well across different email clients

○ A test has been sent and delivered to a seed list

○ You have any approval needed to click SEND

○ You've asked yourself: If I were the recipient, would this email be of value to me?

About Melt Content

Melt Content builds strategic, data-backed organic marketing campaigns. Our work is founded on close collaboration between technical, SEO, editorial and outreach experts, and we've done it for some of the biggest names in the travel industry, including hotel groups, tourist boards, OTAs, tour operators and trade bodies.

For more information visit www.meltcontent.com

About Revinate

Revinate helps hotels know more about their guests so they can deliver personalized experiences that create valuable relationships and lifelong customers. Using guest data combined with our marketing engagement platform, hotels can better understand and engage their audiences, increasing loyalty and revenue. 30,000 of the world's leading hotels trust Revinate to help them reinvent the guest experience.

For more information visit www.revinate.com

Market contact Melt Content

Helene Hall
Chief Commercial Officer
+44 203 735 5070
helene@meltcontent.com

Market contact Revinate

Thomas Landen
Director of Global Field Marketing
+31 20 240 30 13
thomas@revinate.com

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