



Improving Your Response Rates:

How To Convert Your Text Subscribers To HTML

Overview

The advantages of HTML email campaigns as a marketing medium far outweigh those of a plain text campaign. For instance, HTML messages tend to receive higher click-through rates than text messages, and they enhance your branding efforts. However, just because you have permission to email someone, it doesn't mean you have permission to email them a HTML message. This BoldFish Note provides you with a few strategies on how you can convert your text subscribers to HTML without being presumptuous or intrusive.

BoldFish offers a variety of products, services, and resources to make your next campaign a success. Visit www.boldfish.com to learn more about the products and services that BoldFish offers.

Visit [The BoldFish Opt-In Resource Center Online](#) to learn more about best practices in Opt-In Email Communications.

The Advantages of Offering HTML

HTML messages offer you a larger palette with which you can craft your message. HTML messages allow the sender to utilize color, text and page formatting, and graphics (such as product images or your company logo) to improve your message and enhance your branding efforts. These items make for a more compelling message, and ultimately, higher click through rates. HTML messages have the added bonus of enabling marketers to calculate an estimated "open rate" by counting the number of times a certain image is retrieved from the senders' server. The differences between Text and HTML messages exist not only in their appearances, but also in their impact. To illustrate, here is a general text message sent to the recipients of the BoldFish Opt-In Report:

```
From: owner-emntxt@thresher.boldfish.com on behalf of editor@boldfish.com    Sent: Wed 6/13/2001 1:54 PM
To: BoldFish Opt-In Report Newsletter TEXT Recipients
Cc:
Subject: BoldFish Opt-In Report - Respect Your Subscribers

Welcome to the BoldFish Opt-In Report
~~~~~
June 13, 2001

IN THIS ISSUE:

FEATURED ON BOLDFISH.COM:
Respect Your Subscribers:
Tips to keep your subscriber base happy and intact.
http://www.boldfish.com/BF\_emguide/respect.html
Many who have an opt-in email list feel that capturing their
subscriber names is most important part of the list process,
along with developing content and/or special offers to increase
sales. They sometimes forget, however, that maintaining that
list should be first and foremost in their minds. Maintaining a
loyal and solid subscriber base entails showing your customers
respect. If you don't respect your audience, you will lose them,
and a lost customer is the hardest to win back. This BoldFish
Note gives you a few guidelines to set as standards in your
programs to keep your subscribers happy, and to give you a
leg up on keeping the customers you've worked so hard to acquire.

FEATURED ON EMARKETER.COM:
Featured on eMarketer.com:
Spam and Sausages
by Jonathan Jackson
http://www.emarketer.com/analysis/email\_marketing/20010604\_email.html
It doesn't look as though the problem of spam will be going
away anytime soon. In recent months, reputable e-mail
marketers and consumers have naively (foolishly?) looked to
Washington to solve the problem with legislation. A number
of bills were introduced and hopes were high that Congress
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Not bad, as far as plain text messages go. We still have the clickable (and trackable) links, but we can do better.

Have you found a technique that helps you convert your readers to a new format that we haven't covered?

Let us know! Email us at editor@boldfish.com or write to us at our corporate headquarters. We'd love to hear from you!

Here is the same message, only in HTML:

From: owner-editor@thesharper.boldfish.com on behalf of editor@boldfish.com

Sent: Wed 6/13/2001 11:08 AM

To: BoldFish Opt-In Report Newsletter HTML Recipients

Cc:

Subject: BoldFish Opt-In Report - Respect Your Subscribers



The BoldFish Opt-In Report

your monthly "catch" of opt-in communications best practices

BoldFish Opt-In Report, June 13, 2001

IN THIS ISSUE:

Featured on BoldFish.com:
[Respect Your Subscribers:](#)
[Tips to keep your subscriber base happy and intact.](#)

Many who have an opt-in email list feel that capturing their subscriber names is most important part of the list process, along with developing content and/or special offers to increase sales. They sometimes forget, however, that maintaining that list should be first and foremost in their minds. Maintaining a loyal and solid subscriber base entails showing your customers respect. If you don't respect your audience, you will lose them, and a lost customer is the hardest to win back. This BoldFish Note gives you a few guidelines to set as standards in your programs to keep your subscribers happy, and to give you a leg up on keeping the customers you've worked so hard to acquire.

Featured on ClickZ.com:
[E-Newsletters: A No Brainer](#)

by Debbie Weil

I was going to start this column with a snappy lead-in. E-newsletters are the killer app of B2B email marketing! But I decided not to. Think back to 12-18 months ago, and you'll recall that "killer app" was a phrase thrown around with abandon. It meant the newest, breakthrough Internet technology application in a particular category, whether it was a Web-based calendar (for personal productivity) or live chat (for CRM -- customer relationship management). Sigh. Those heady, silly days are gone. What's left, however, is not all that bad. We've got all the pieces of the online and offline marketing puzzle laid out in front of us. The challenge now is more mundane.

Visit BoldFish at these upcoming shows:
[CRM Solutions Chicago 2001](#)
July 31-Aug 2
McCormick Place
Chicago, IL
Booth #570

[Customer 360 Fall 2001](#)
Aug 20-22
Moscone Center
San Francisco, CA
Booth #502

Did You Miss An Issue? Not to Worry! Archives of BoldFish Newsletters are available online. Visit our archives section and see what we've been up to!

We'd love to hear your questions, comments and suggestions! Who knows, you may appear in a future BoldFish Opt-In Report! Drop us a line at editor@boldfish.com.

Did you receive this newsletter from a friend or colleague? [Click Here](#) for a free subscription to yourself!

Big difference, huh? This is the exact same content as the text message, but the impact is much greater. The mere addition of the BoldFish logo and a graphic header make it more visually appealing, and easier to read. Ultimately, this message is more likely to be read. Text messages are flat, and offer less of a sizzle factor. For this reason, text messages usually result in lower click-through and conversion rates. With the visual advantages that HTML messages offer, it is no wonder that senders are scrambling to convert their text recipients to HTML.

Keep in mind, though, that even if you offer the bells and whistles of HTML or alternate mediums, many people still won't opt-in, due to personal preference or other factors, such as dial-up speed or operating systems. Pushing the recipient too hard could cause them to opt-out of your mailings entirely. Limited contact (via text messages) is better than no contact at all.

This BoldFish Note offers a few guidelines to get you started in your quest for conversion. These tactics can also help you convert your HTML readers to other formats (such as Wireless or Rich Media messages). Who knows, in some instances, you may want to convert readers back to text.

Subscribe to the BoldFish Opt-In Report

Receive updates on email marketing's best practices, notification of email marketing events, and strategies to make your next email marketing campaign a success.

To receive The BoldFish Opt-In Report Newsletter on a monthly basis, sign up on the BoldFish home page or via the following web link:
http://www.boldfish.com/BF_emguide/newsletter_signup.html.

Before You Begin...

Ask yourself why you are offering HTML in the first place, and why you want your readers to convert. What added value comes with the HTML version? When you figure that out, let your readers know! You should be offering the same great promotions in both emails you send, but if the HTML version lets your readers see that great widget you now sell in 48 different colors, tell them! Do you offer certain interactive features such as movie times, weather forecasts, or extensive personalization such as portfolio tracking? If so, then tell them! Tell them why they should subscribe to HTML, such as added features of HTML, ease of reading and the ability to see products, and you have better odds at a higher conversion rate. According to the latest Email Marketing Report from eMarketer, anecdotal evidence suggests that HTML e-mail campaigns get 2 to 3 times higher response rate than plain text. Direct Research indicated that the average click-through rate for Text was 15.4% while the rate for HTML was 18.4%.

Don't Send the HTML Version without Permission (not even just this once)

It is tempting to sneak an HTML message out to a text-only list. We know that you feel the HTML version is much prettier and offers a better look at your products and delivers your message with more force. And we know that you think your subscribers will really like it much better than that plain old text version. What harm could it do? Well, it can backfire on you. Much like using opt-out lists – it's not a good idea. By not honoring your subscriber's preferences, you may alienate them, which may lead them to unsubscribe. Why risk shooting yourself in the foot by losing the names you have worked so hard to attain?

You may also decide that you'd like to utilize sniffing technology to send HTML messages to those who can receive them. You produce your HTML content and your Text content, and mail to your list. Sniffing technology will identify if the recipient can read HTML messages, and automatically sends HTML, regardless of the recipient preference. This is not a good idea either, and could mean an increase in your unsubscribe rates.

Show some restraint. The real issue here is that you haven't *asked* their permission to send them the HTML version. And, if you haven't asked their permission, you are breaking their trust. By taking this approach you are very likely to alienate, and possibly lose, a good portion of your subscriber base. Some recipients may even perceive this as spam, and report you. And we all know what happens to spammers (for more on spamming see our BoldFish Note: [How to Be Completely Opt-In Compliant](#)). It is best to ask your recipients and convert them only *after* you have received their permission to do so.

Ask Subscribers to Opt-In Via Your Text Email

The easiest way to convert your readers is to simply ask them in your next email communication. Let your text readers know that the HTML version is available in the next text campaign that you send out. This can be as simple as a single sentence at the top of the message and can read: "The HTML version of the BoldFish Opt-In Report is now available. To sign up for the HTML version of the newsletter, [click here](#)." Give them the chance to see what they are missing as well. Include a line that says something like: "To view a sample of the HTML version, [click here](#)."

Try different placement locations for your announcement. You may want to place this at the top of your message for a few weeks, but as your conversions wind down, you may want to play with different placements (middle of your message in a callout section, or at the end of your message). Test different placements so you can get the most conversions as possible.

But What About?

Do you have a suggestion that we didn't cover? We are always on the lookout for new topics to cover in our articles. Let us know your ideas and you could end up in a future BoldFish Note!

Email us at editor@boldfish.com, or send us a note via regular mail

Ask New Subscribers to Opt-In Via Your Web Site

Your website is an excellent way to get the word out about your new format. First and foremost, add the option of HTML to your signup form. Beyond that, adding a small icon (or line of copy) on all relevant pages on your site will let your visitors (and possible current subscribers) know the formats that are available to them. It is ideal that you offer a way for current subscribers to change their preferences, either via an email address to which they can write, or via a personal preference or personal profile page.

Be sure to post a sample newsletter on your site to let them see the difference. It is important to remember that organizations use HTML differently. Some merely utilize the text formatting options of HTML in their messages while others go all out and include text and page formatting, color, graphics (and even sound or other forms of rich media). Showing how you will be using HTML to enhance their experience can make a tremendous difference in your conversion rates.

Confirm Their Preference Through Other Channels

Remember, you can utilize the same channels with which you built your list to convert your readers to your new format. In addition to posting a notice on your website, utilize other areas of your business that are available to you, such as sales reps, registration cards, invoices, and collateral in order to convert your readers to a new format. Have your customer service representatives confirm preferences when they have current or prospective subscribers on the phone. Have your booth staff confirm preferences when on-site at a tradeshow. Have your online forms confirm recipient preferences and promote your new and improved format offerings.

Let It Go If They Aren't Interested.

There is only so much you can do to get your subscriber to switch format preferences before you start annoying them. If they don't want HTML, or the format you are promoting, don't keep pushing it on them. The latest eMarketer Email Marketing Report estimates approximately 60% of e-mail users in the US were able to receive HTML e-mail by the end of 1999. But, there are a variety of reasons that your subscriber may prefer to receive a text message instead of an HTML message (or wireless, or rich media). They could be reading their messages offline and may be unable to access content from your server, or they may have a very slow connection for downloading mail either from home or while on business travel. The higher file size of HTML messages can make message reception much slower. Maybe they read their mail on their PDA, which has less bandwidth, poor html rendering and a small screen. Maybe they are on an older version of AOL. Or maybe they just prefer text. Regardless, don't push or pry in order to convert this recipient. Your primary focus is to keep your recipient, not alienate them. Remember, a happy subscriber stays with you.

About BoldFish, Inc.

BoldFish, Inc. develops high volume, opt-in email infrastructure solutions. The BoldFish Express Network enables organizations to send high volumes of highly personalized email to their customers in a more cost effective, efficient manner than ever possible before. With an architecture and product that enable campaigns of millions of messages, BoldFish has a "opt-in" philosophy and incorporates an anti-spam clause in its licensing.

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