



**oops!**

# Handling and resolving email marketing mistakes

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

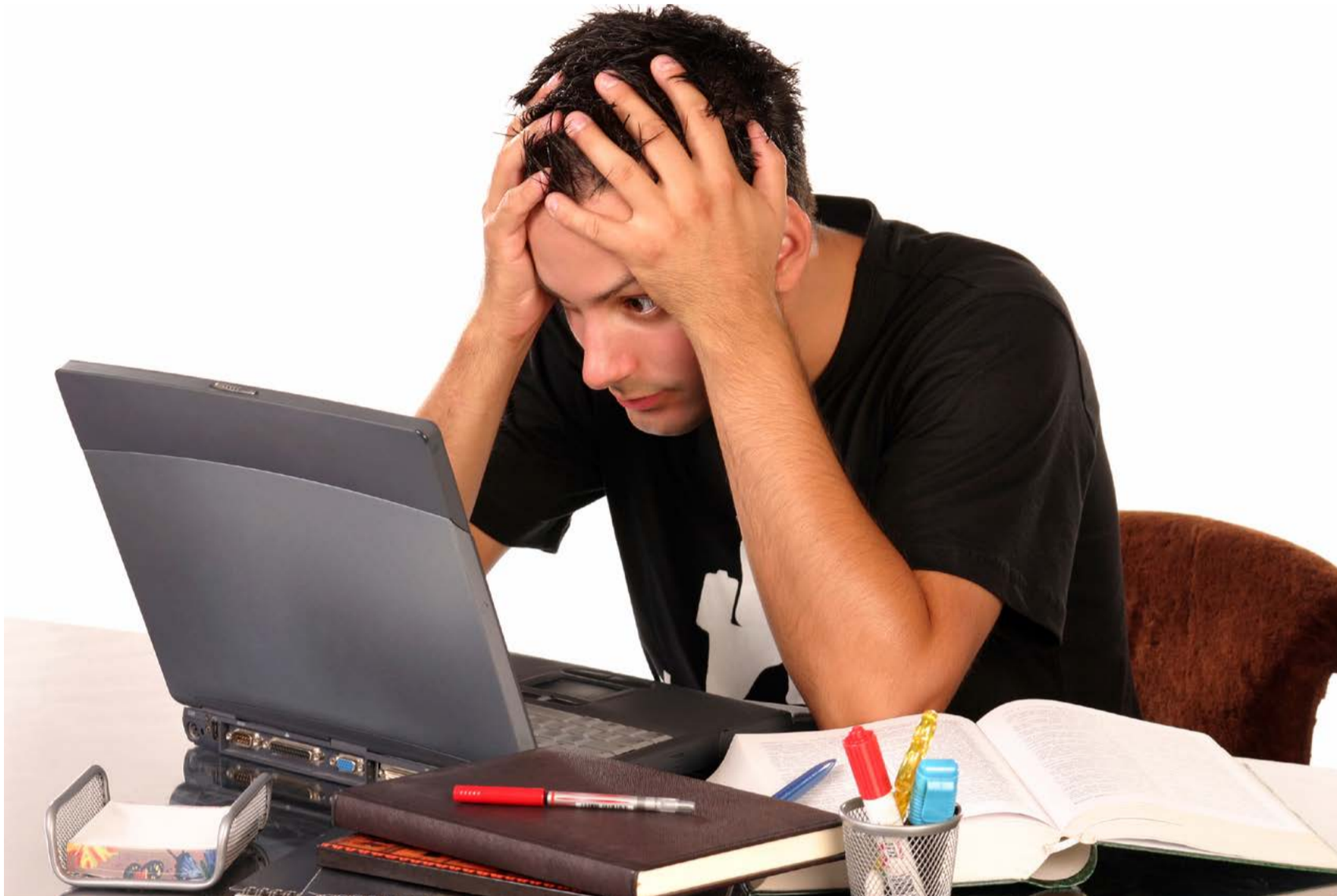
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<b>OOPS!</b> . . . . .	1
<b>The Usual Suspects.</b> . . . . .	3
Typos. . . . .	3
Missing Images. . . . .	4
Stray Code . . . . .	5
Alignment Problems . . . . .	6
Watch Out for Divs. . . . .	6
<b>The Unusual Suspects</b> . . . . .	7
Placeholders . . . . .	7
Merge Errors . . . . .	7
Problems with the Field . . . . .	7
Problems with the Data . . . . .	8
Segmentation . . . . .	8
Dynamic Content . . . . .	8
Deployment Errors. . . . .	9
Link Problems . . . . .	9
Animated Gifs . . . . .	10
Match Your Content With the Links . . . . .	11
A/B Split Mistakes . . . . .	11
White on White Text . . . . .	11
It Looks Fine to Me. . . . .	12
<b>The Mailbox Factor.</b> . . . . .	13
You've Got No Style . . . . .	13

Live Mail is the Devil . . . . .	13
Three-Digit Hex Color Codes . . . . .	14
Skip the Doctype. . . . .	14
Testing Across Multiple Formats . . . . .	14
<b>How to Deal With Mistakes . . . . .</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>In-Process Recoveries Using Symphonie. . . . .</b>	<b>17</b>
Pause Mailing . . . . .	17
Fix Links . . . . .	17
<b>Summary . . . . .</b>	<b>18</b>

# OOPS!

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It's Tuesday morning. You've worked all weekend to finish the email announcing your company's annual half-off sale—the biggest sale of the year. You've segmented the list and made sure that everyone will receive the correct version of the mailing for their demographic. You've been extra careful to make sure that the dynamic content you're using in the body copy displays properly for everyone across all parameters. You've added intriguing alt tags to all the images, guaranteed to make the recipients choose to display the images.

But the window of opportunity is closing fast. Research shows that if you don't get that email out in the next two hours, its open and

clickthrough rate will drop by a whopping twenty percent. It's now or never, you think as you click the "Send mailing" button, breath a sigh of relief, and go for a latte at Starbucks.

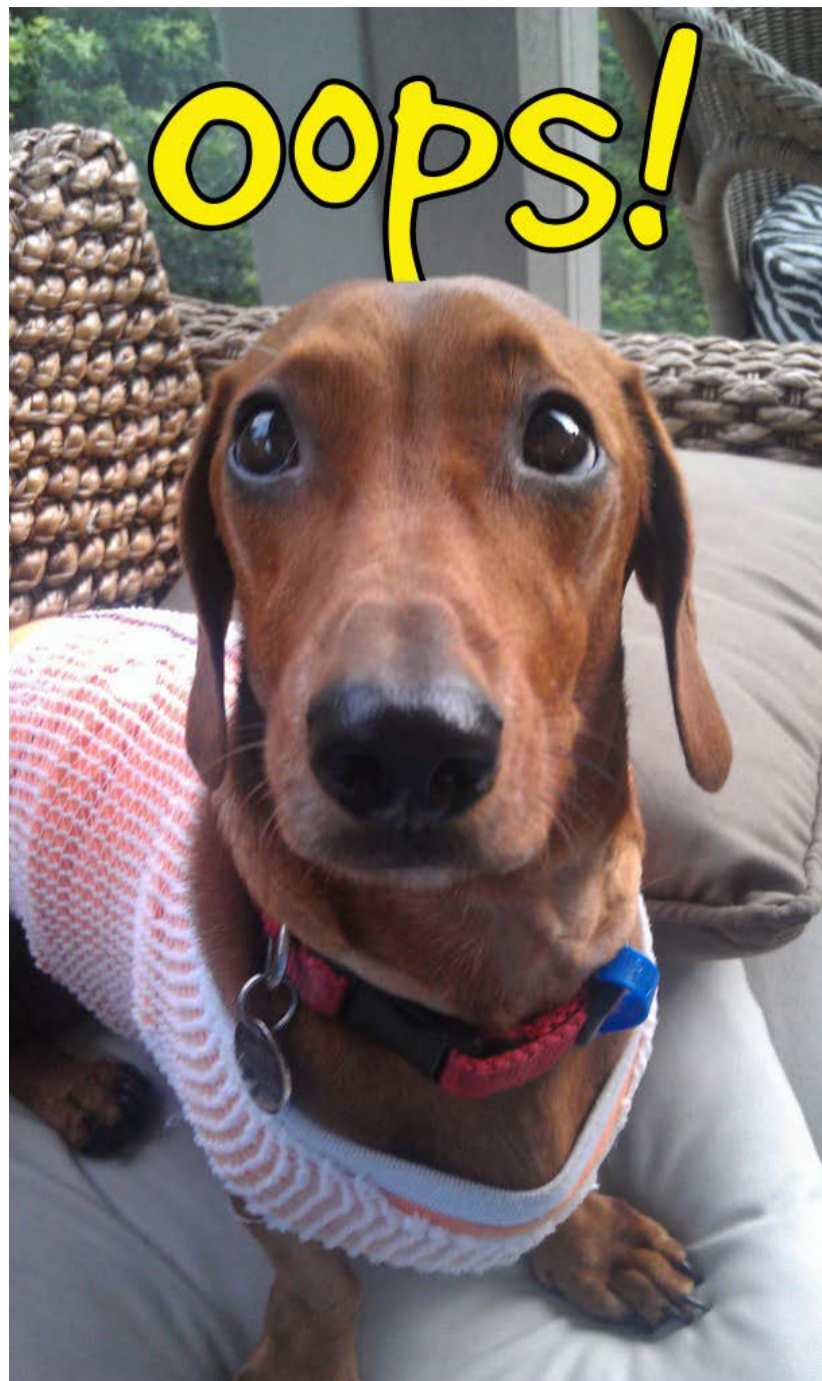
A little while later you check your inbox and to see if the email arrived. It has, but the subject line reads: "Subject line to come." You forgot the subject line! You quickly fire up your email marketing system again, add the subject line, and send it, but the damage is done. People are already tweeting about it online.

Nobody who takes pride in their work is happy when they find out they've sent something out with a mistake in it. Everyone has done it, but that doesn't make it any

easier to stomach. Mistakes might be simple ones, such as typos or incomplete sentences, or they might be real problems, such as incorrect content or the wrong pricing information. Some mistakes are minor, while other mistakes can border on the catastrophic. Sometimes, a mistake can actually be a Godsend (more on this later), while at other times it can leave a company with a real mess to clean up.

This white paper isn't about the things you shouldn't do in your email, things like creating email without alt tags and too many images. That information can be found in our two-volume set of Best Practices guides. It also isn't about errors in judgment. There is no procedure on earth that can guard against bad judgment. It's about the things you know are wrong but that somehow happen anyway. It's about the things that, if you had just one more minute to look at the email, you would have spotted. It's about the "Doh!" moments and the head slappers. It's about how to prevent them, and what to do if the mailing has already been sent. It's also about taking mistakes—even bad ones—and using them to your advantage. It also about the things to look out for that nobody ever talks about. Things that can make an email unreadable on one email client, yet still look just fine on another.

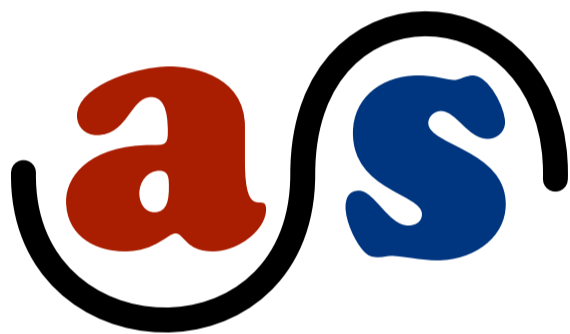
The examples given here are real, but no criticism, either implied or implicit, is intended of the companies shown. The fact that some of these companies are major corporations demonstrates how everyone is susceptible to email errors, no matter how big and well-staffed.



# THE USUAL SUSPECTS

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Some mistakes are all too common. They happen everyday and are easily prevented. Here are the main contenders. These are easy mistakes to make, but they are also easy to correct. Because these mistakes are so common, there is a certain familiarity factor which makes them seem less catastrophic than other mistakes, but that doesn't make us feel any better when we find them.



## Typos

Not surprisingly, typos are responsible for most of the errors in email. These can be anything from a missing apostrophe to transposed characters (see cover). In the grand scheme of things, a typo is usually a minor problem, unless it leads to an incorrect reading of the text. The omission of an important word can completely subvert your meaning. A subject line that is supposed to read "Buy now and not pay for six months," is going to send a very different message if "not" is removed.

Small typos may make you look unprofessional, but they are the easiest to avoid, and they are common enough that even the most diligent writer is bound to

produce a few typos from time to time. Unless they either alter the meaning of the email or its subject line, or they make it incomprehensible, typos are seldom worth a follow-up.

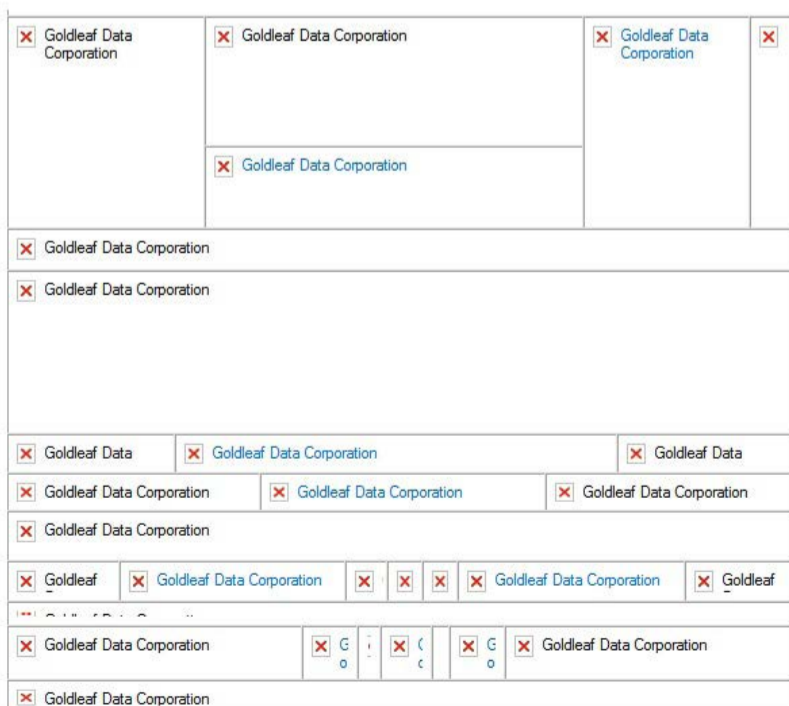
This doesn't mean they aren't a problem. If you find yourself making a lot of typographical errors, you better make sure that you aren't the only person reading your copy. It's a simple fact of life that you cannot proofread your own work. The human mind has an amazing knack for filling in the missing pieces or skipping over duplicate words. At least one other person needs to look at every email before it is sent. Other people are more likely to spot your typos and incomplete sentences than you are. If more people look at it, it is less likely a mistake will get through. Some people have a knack for finding typos, while others do not. It is from the first group that you should enlist your proofreaders.



## Missing images

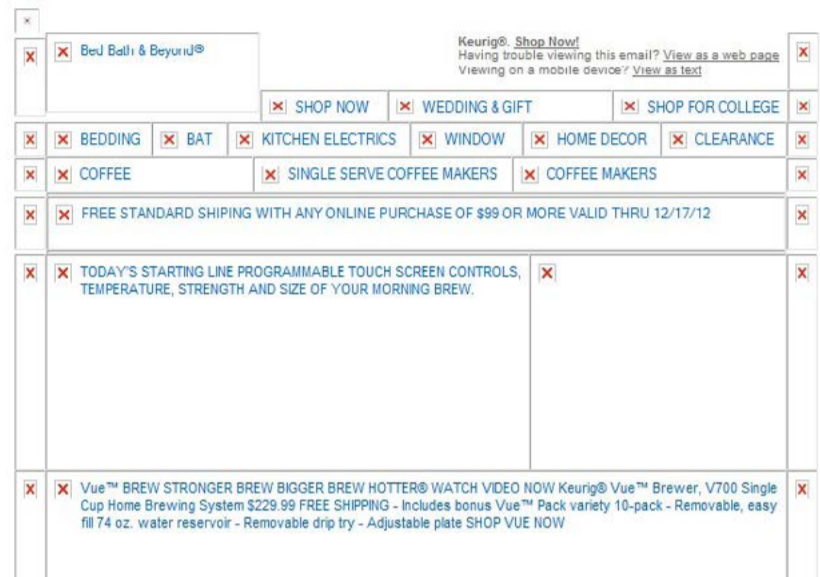
Missing images, while not as common as typos, are common enough to keep you on your guard. They can be very hard to catch as the email may look perfect at your office but not anywhere else. This happens when the image links you've provided in your email are local to your computer or a staging server that is restricted to in-house access. Once the email is sent to the rest of the world, those links are no longer accessible and the pictures return as empty boxes. Normally this would only be a problem for customers hosting their own images, as the ESPs image library should render the same in previews and tests as it does in production.

If you're following best practices, all images will have alt tags. This isn't a solution for missing images, but it does make the issue less of a problem. Well-commented images help make sense out of what would otherwise be a bunch of empty boxes. Even without server errors or design glitches, many email clients do not display images by default, so make sure you have something enticing for the reader (for more on this, see *Best Practices Enhanced – Design and Image Management*, available from Goolara). Consider the following email:

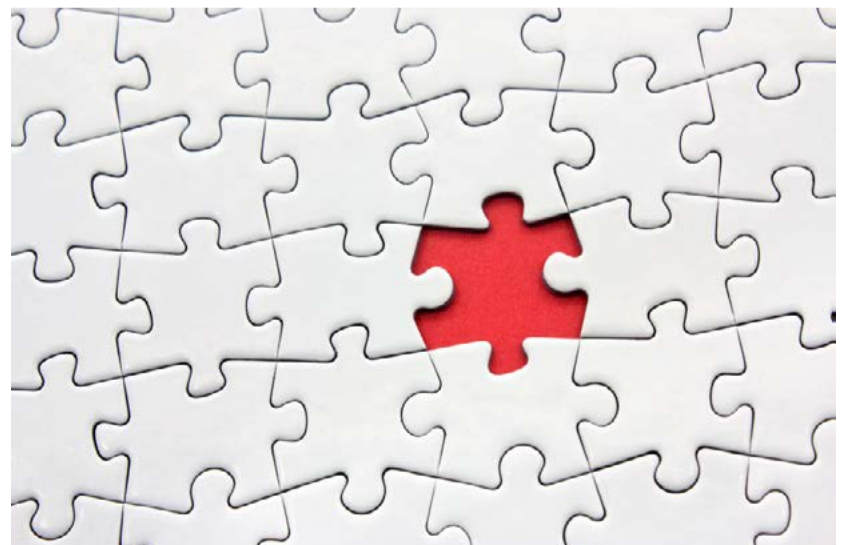


The images are missing in this case because "display images" was not chosen, but the emailer should have prepared for both this eventually and the possibility of some other error by giving these images meaningful alt tags. Even if they had only added alt tags to a few of the most important images it would have been better than this blank and meaningless display.

Now let's look at an email by someone who did it right:



In this email, the only images without alt tags are the ones that are purely decorative. Even without the images, the email has value. The alt tags entice us to display the images and to click on the links even without the images.





## Stray Code

Most email marketing systems have WYSIWYG editors for designing and laying out email, but sometimes it might be necessary to work in HTML directly. As with content, you can mistype code too. The difference is that when you mistype a word in the content, it is merely a typo, whereas a mistyped word in your HTML code can screw up the entire email, sometimes dramatically. Forgetting one left angle bracket can turn an entire block of code from instructions into gibberish. Code errors can be hard to spot while your working on a mailing, but will stick out like a sore thumb as soon as you preview your email.

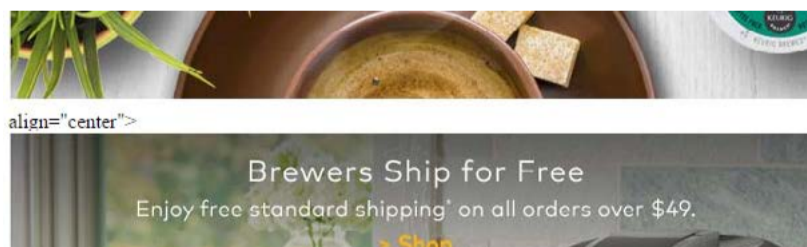
Your first line of defense in any mailing is to run a test preview. The test preview will render the contents of your email in formats that match the popular email clients, and will merge the data and dynamic content, so you can see the content exactly as the user will

receive it. In this way you can make sure that everything looks right, and that there are no unexpected alignment or spacing issues when the dynamic content is rendered. The test preview will also help give you a better idea of how your content will look when it has menus, ads, and other content surrounding it.

If you are not doing so already, you also should be sending test emails to multiple accounts after you run test previews. Ideally, you'll want to send email to the major online email clients (Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail/Outlook, and AOL) and at least one desktop email client (Outlook is the most common). Code errors are easier to spot once a mailing has been sent, and often show up as soon as you look at a preview version of the mailing, but look closely; in some cases, the code may appear where there is already an image, which can make it harder to spot.



```
img class="logo" style="width: 100%; height:auto; color: #a212c6; font-family: Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif; font-size: 30px; text-decoration: none; font-weight: bold;" src="http://CustomerWebData.goolara.net/test/newbluraylogo.jpg" alt="THE MOVIE REPORT">
```



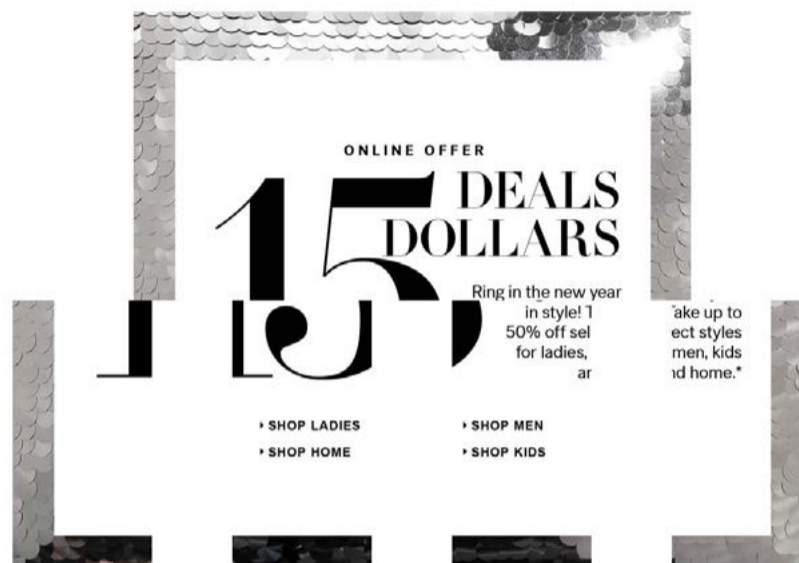
In the top left example, we see the email banner as it should appear. In the example below it, we see what happens when the left angle bracket is omitted. This mistake would be easily caught by previewing the mailing before it's sent, but sometimes, these mistakes are harder to spot, as is the case with the two examples on the right.

## Alignment problems

Aside from missing images, the number one problem for images is misalignment. This occurs when an image is sliced into pieces and those pieces don't correctly line up. The usual reason for image slicing is to assign different links to specific sections of one image. You can also do this with image mapping, but there are problems with alignment on mobile phones (see our **Email Image Linking Guide** for further information on this subject).

You should do extra testing for alignment problems across the various email clients before sending any email that contains segmented images. If you are using a table to assemble the image, the addition of "display: block;" to the "img" information should eliminate any extra space between the table

cells. You must also make sure that the border, cellpadding, and cellspacing values are all set to zero. The other thing to watch for is sizing differences. The table holding the image sections should be constrained by an exact size that is based on the size of the original image. Otherwise, you might end up with a situation like this:



## Watch Out for Divs

As we've stated many times in other guides and white papers, it is better to use tables for positioning elements in an email than divs. The image shown above is a good example of what can happen if you decide to line up your images using divs instead of tables. This is a very common source of email alignment problems, mostly because many designers work primarily in web design, rather than exclusively in email design. In the early days of the worldwide web, designers discovered that they could use tables to control the position

of an image or a block of text on a web page. Somewhere along the line it was decreed that tables should no longer be used for anything other than tabular data. From now on, if you want to position something on a page, you should use divs. Web designers were quick to adopt this new approach. Email clients, however, were not. As a result, many email clients ignore divs, but will accept tables. It is for this reason that you will sometimes hear people say that you should design your email "like it's 1999."

# THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

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These errors are less common, but that doesn't mean you can ignore them. Some of them, in fact, are more likely to happen to more experienced people than beginners, starting with the first case.



Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Integer nec odio. Praesent libero. Sed cursus ante dapibus diam. Sed nisi. Nulla quis sem at nibh elementum imperdiet. Duis sagittis ipsum. Praesent mauris. Fusce nec tellus sed augue semper porta. Mauris massa. Vestibulum lacinia arcu eget nulla. Class aptent taciti sociosqu ad litora torquent per conubia nostra, per inceptos himenaeos. Curabitur sodales ligula in libero. Sed dignissim lacinia nunc.

Curabitur tortor. Pellentesque nibh. Aenean quam. In scelerisque sem at dolor. Maccenas mattis. Sed convallis tristique sem. Proin ut ligula vel nunc egestas porttitor. Morbi lectus

## Placeholders

Placeholder text used when the person designing the email hasn't received the final copy, but either needs to get started, or has to provide the copywriter with some idea of how much text they need to provide. Sometimes they'll use a descriptive phrase, such as "Subject line here," or "Insert link here," but the most common form of placeholder is the "lorem ipsum" text that is often used to display sample pages. The Internet is filled with examples of pages that contain this text. In email, there is rarely enough text to warrant the use of lorem ipsum. Slip-ups, such as leaving the word "TEST" at the beginning of a subject line, are more common.

Placeholders are a great way to get a sense of layout and design, and they can help keep a project rolling while you wait for other information. As with typos, a good proofreader will catch this particular problem immediately, especially if they've encountered it in the past. If you are using placeholders,

you should make a note to yourself and your proofreaders to look out for these during the proofreading cycle.

## Merge Errors

When used judiciously, mail merge can add a nice level of personalization to your mailings. Information such as a person's name, the store where they shop, or the city where they live can be added to the email to make their email seem less generic. Although rare, things can go wrong here as well. Most of the errors are related to one of two problems: the field itself, or the data in the field.

## Problems with the Field

Nearly all of us have, at one time or another, received an email that began:

Dear %%FIRST\_NAME%%,

Nothing reduces you to a number faster than this particular error. It pulls back the curtain and shows us the marketing machinery behind the message. The harm from a missing field result is multiplied when it appears in the subject line, greatly increasing the odds that the email won't be opened. 99.99% of



the times that this occurs it is attributable to human error. Someone new to the job thinks that typing in the characters they saw in a merge document will automatically create a merge field, or some similar scenario. Any email marketing solution worth its salt is going to prevent this from happening. It should limit your choice of merge fields to fields that actually exist. In any case, if this is a problem, you should be able to spot it easily enough during the preview phase.

### Problems with the Data

A far more common issue is missing information caused when some of the recipient demographics are left blank. In the example described above, if the merge field tag is correct it is more likely to return this:

Dear ,

While this is not as bad as the merge field title itself appearing in the mailing, it's not exactly desirable either. You can avoid this situation completely in one of two ways: segmentation and dynamic content.

### Segmentation

A quick way to eliminate the problem is to only send email to people who have a value entered in the specified field. In our example, that would be anyone who has their first name on file. This eliminates the problem entirely, and ensures that every email will begin with someone's first name and not a blank space between words. Segmentation can be useful when the specific field is important. For instance, if you only wanted to send email to people who have a membership ID, you could segment the file to include only those people. In the case of the first name, however, this particular qualifier is of little use. You may want to address your recipients as personally as possible, but you

also want to make sure that the people who are missing this information still get an email without those pesky blank spaces before the punctuation. For this, you'll need dynamic content.

### Dynamic Content

Dynamic content lets you create either/or scenarios based on the data you have about your recipients. In the case of the first name problem shown above, you would set the mailing up so that if the first name field is empty, a more generic appellation is inserted. As long as there is a value in the field, that value will appear in the mailing. Otherwise, the person receives a generic salutation such as "Dear Valued Browse'n'Shop Customer." This eliminates the problem of missing information and ensures that your mailings make sense to all the recipients.

***“It’s a best practice to use a few random email addresses to check your dynamic content. This gives you a better chance of encountering potential problems in the mailing before it is sent.”***

You can check your dynamic content before sending a mailing by using your email marketing software's preview rendering feature. Better software will render the dynamic content in the previews, giving you a quick idea of how things will turn out before you click "Send." It is a best practice to use a few random email addresses to

check this. This gives you a better chance of encountering potential problems in the mailing before it is sent. For the preview renderings, it is best not to use in-house addresses. They are far more likely to have complete and properly entered data, and you'll stand a better chance of catching problems if you are not working from a list of hand-picked recipients.



## Deployment Errors

### Timing Errors

An email announcing a "Today Only" sale won't do anyone any good if the message doesn't land in the inbox until the day after the sale. This particular mistake is usually the result of a marketer trying to send the email at the last possible minute without taking into consideration the fact that some IPS put commercial email on hold for a short period to ensure it is a legitimate message and not spam (for more on this subject, see our white paper, Deliverability Enhanced). This is especially true during the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas, when the amount of email being delivered increases substantially. During this time of year, it is not uncommon for email providers to tighten up their inbox restrictions to ensure that their users aren't overwhelmed. More email gets rejected and more email gets greylisted, which can lead to late deliveries.

Users of Goolara Symphonie and a few other email marketing solutions (but not many, sadly) have the option of specifying a cutoff time on their mailings. If a mailing does not reach a recipient within a certain amount of time it is canceled. Any mailings that are time sensitive and require, for whatever reason, that they be sent close to the event date should have a cutoff date specified to avoid problems. If this isn't an option, your best bet is to send a few days before the event to ensure that the email stands a better chance of being delivered before its expiration date.



## Link Problems

"The hurrier I go, the behinder I get," wrote Lewis Carroll. He also wrote, "It takes all the running you can do to stay in the same place." Anyone who has ever worked on a deadline is familiar with these sentiments. The more traditional adage, "Haste makes waste," says it less colorfully, but the meaning is still clear. The easiest things to screw up when working on a tight deadline are links. You can have the most beautiful email in the world, but if that email was supposed to contain a link to a page and it doesn't, then it suddenly loses its value, forcing you to send out a corrected mailing to draw people to your site. When your proofreaders check your work, make sure they test the links, because if they don't catch the problem, your recipients will.

Sometimes the link will be there, but it does not go where it should. Clicking on a picture of a winter coat takes you to children's shoes, or an image with information about a specific sale takes you, instead, to a site's home page, with no further information on how to get to the sale page. This usually happens because someone decided that rather than reinvent the wheel, they'd use a previous version of an email, but forgot to check the links throughout the document. Changing the image source on a document, without changing the href at the same time is the most usual cause of this problem.

```
<a href="http://browsenshop.com/childrensdept"></a>
```

In the example above, the image and its alt tag were changed for use in an email about a sale in the Men's Department, but the href still directs any clicks on the image to the Children's Department. This is less of an issue with Symphonie, since Symphonie can handle both images and links dynamically.

No matter what email marketing software you use, every link in a pending email should be tested before sending. If the email has already been sent, what you do next will depend on which email marketing solution you are using. Most email marketing software cannot correct a broken or incorrect link once the email has been sent. A notable exception is Goolara Symphonie, which lets you fix links on the fly.

## Animating Gifs

Animated gifs can make an email interesting, but, while most email readers will work with animated gifs, Outlook 2007 and 2010 will only display the first frame of the gif. Usually animated gifs are created to build up to a final

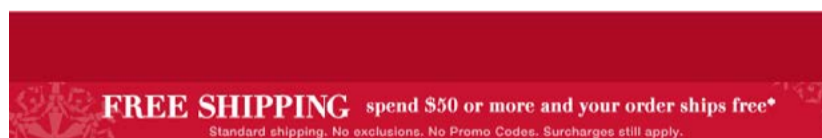
reveal—a train pulls a banner announcing a 20% off sale, or a balloon pops to reveal a 30% discount for members. If the recipient is viewing that email in Outlook they will only see the very beginning of the train in the first case and an unpopped balloon in the second. You can solve this easily by taking the final frame of the gif and allowing it to appear for a split second at the beginning of the animation. Most people won't notice this blip and those who are viewing the animation in Outlook will see only that first frame, which now contains the some useful information instead of a meaningless graphic.

That is the approach that Bed, Bath & Beyond took for their holiday email. Here is the first frame of their animated gif:



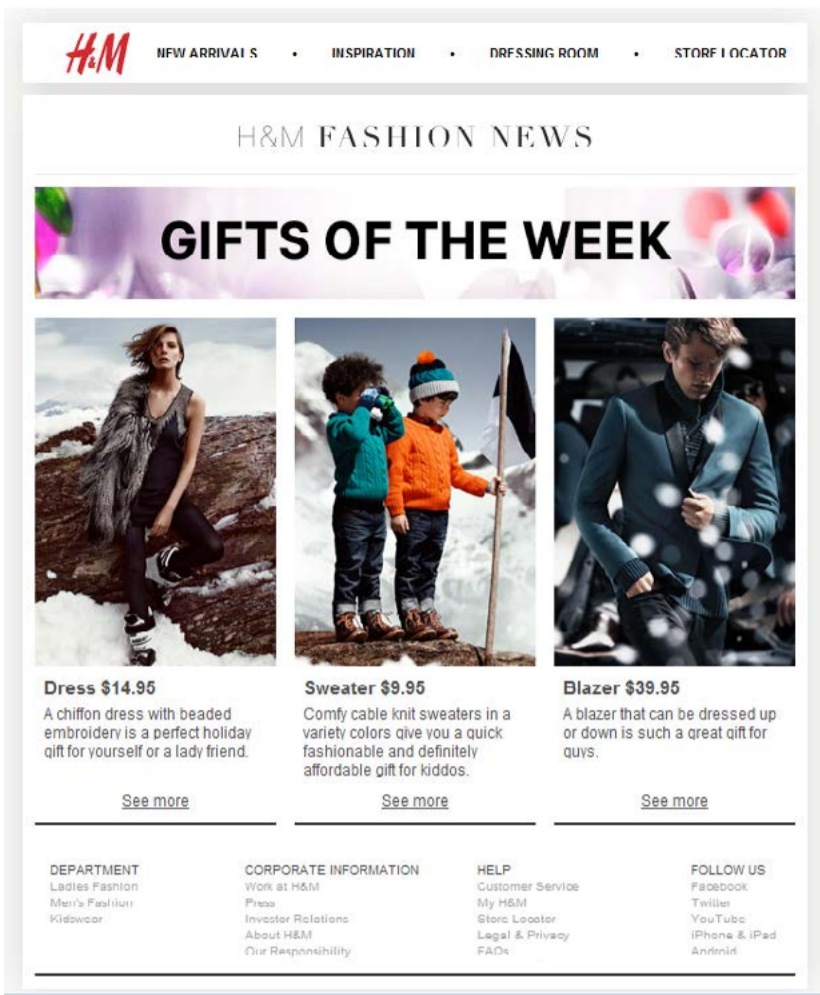
It is exactly the same as the last frame, but in between the truck pulls out the banner about free shipping. The opening image goes by so quickly that almost no one notices it.

Kohl's department store used a very similar idea, but they forgot to add a microsecond of the last frame to the beginning of the animation, so here is what you see when you open the email in Outlook:



And here's the final frame of the gif.





## Match Your Content With the Links

While not technically a mistake, linking all your photos to the same page, regardless of their content, is not a good idea. In the example shown above from H&M, it doesn't matter whether you want a man's blazer or a woman's dress, you end up in the same place. A missed opportunity to gather meaningful data.

## A/B Split Mistakes

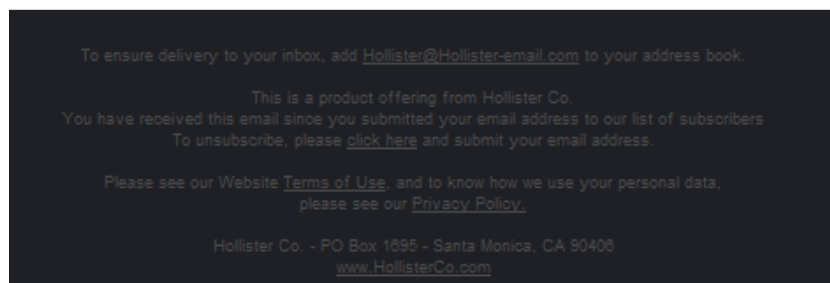
A common source of email errors comes in the form of A/B splits. By far the most common split problem occurs when the splits were either not implemented, or implemented incorrectly, resulting in recipients receiving both (or several) mailings. This is more likely to occur if you are creating split segments outside of your software. Any email marketing software worth its salt will remember who has been sent each split. If your email marketing software requires you to create separate files for the split tests, there is always a chance that you will send the same test group alternative versions of the email.



## White on White Text

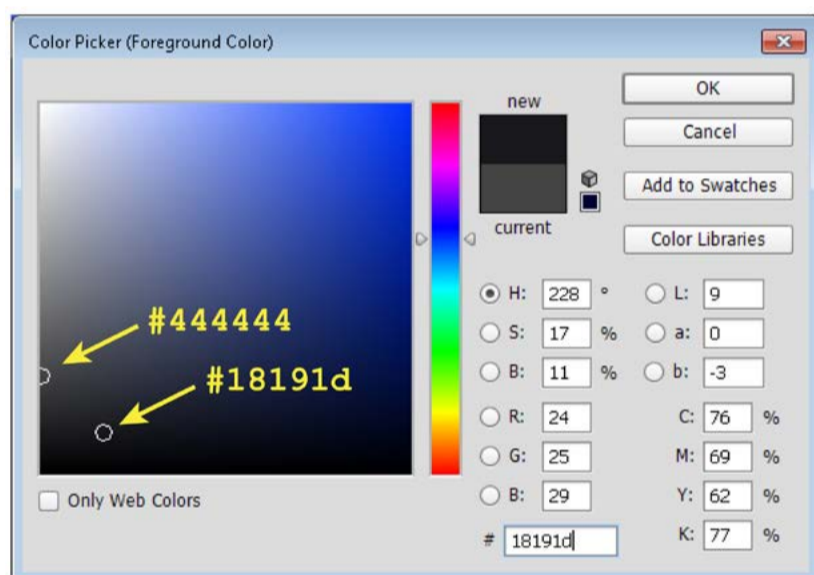
If you are experimenting with colored text on a colored background, be careful that you don't put the same values in both spots. Most of the time, the designer will catch this in the body copy before the email is sent, but they may miss it in the text that falls below the main message. The most common version of this problem is white type that was intended to appear on a dark background, but, for whatever reason, ended up on a white background. Since this text is often required by the CAN-SPAM act, this situation isn't just inconvenience—it's against the law.

A related problem is the use of type that is similar in color to the background. In the example shown below, the designer decided to use dark gray (#444444) type on an almost black (#18191D) background (see Color Picker illustration, next page). Is this a violation of CAN-SPAM? Maybe not, but only just barely.



## It Looks Fine to Me

It may be that the two colors the designer chose for type and background in the previous example appear less similar on their monitors than on ours. This is always a danger. It is a good idea to view your email on a few different platforms to avoid such color issues. Sometimes two colors that look the same on your desktop monitor can appear substantially different on a laptop or a mobile phone. You can't control all of these variables, but you can make sure that no matter which device a recipient uses to view a mailing, they will be able to read the email. It is always better to err on the side of caution and make sure your values aren't too close to each other in appearance.



Here is the Adobe Photoshop Color Picker, showing the two colors used in the example on the previous page. The fact that the chosen colors are so close to each other in value should have given them a clue that there might be a problem.



# THE MAILBOX FACTOR

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In the Usual Suspects chapter we looked at common mistakes that happen to nearly everyone. In the Unusual Suspects chapter we looked at mistakes that, while rare, can happen easily if you're not careful. There is a third category of mistakes that may elude you entirely. In fact, hardly a day goes by when we don't encounter one of these errors. Unlike the errors already listed, these are harder to troubleshoot because they are specific to certain mailbox providers.

## You've Got No Style

The email client that trips people up the most is Gmail. This is because, unlike most other web-based mailbox providers, Gmail ignores any style information that isn't inline. If you want your `<h1>` tags to appear in a bold, sans-serif font at 2 ems, and your `<p>` tags to appear in a serif font at 1.2 ems, you're going to have to make sure that information appears within those tags, like so:

```
<h1 style="font-family: Gotham, 'Helvetica Neue', Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif; font-weight:
```

```
bold; font-size: 2em">This is a headline</h1>
```

```
<p style="font-family: Baskerville, 'Palatino Linotype', Palatino, 'Century Schoolbook', 'Times New Roman', serif; font-size: 1.2em">This is body copy.</p>
```

Otherwise, you'll get whatever Gmail uses as its defaults for these tags. For most style information, this isn't that big a deal. It's easy enough to convert styles to inline, and there are even online sites that will do it for you. But keep in mind that the @media queries necessary for responsive email design cannot be used inline and will not work in Gmail, nor in the Gmail and Yahoo apps for Android and iPhones (they will work in the iPhone's Mail app however).

## Live Mail is the Devil

The worst offender in the category of mailboxes that will mangle your HTML is Microsoft's Live Mail. Live Mail was introduced as part of the Windows Essentials package with Windows 7. It was intended as a replacement for Windows Mail (which shipped with the oft-maligned Vista), which, in turn, was a replacement for Outlook Express. To say that Live Mail is idiosyncratic is an understatement. There are things that will have no bad effects in other email clients, but can render an email unreadable in Live Mail. Fortunately, these are easy to avoid. Here are the main ones to watch out for.

## Three Digit Hex Color Codes

One of the more annoying aspects of Live Mail is its tendency to render any table or body tag that uses a three digit color hex color code in its the bgcolor attribute as black. Here, for instance, is an example using a bgcolor of #FFFFFF (white):

### Don't Miss Our 50% Off Sale!

[Click here to start saving!](#)

Now you can save hundreds of dollars on our products using this one-time only offer.

And here's the exact same example with a three-digit hex color code #FFF (should still be white):



Some will point out that the bgcolor tag, in fact, has been deprecated in HTML5, but, as we've mentioned elsewhere, email often works better with older HTML attributes. If you plan on using the bgcolor attribute in your mailings, make sure you're using six-digit hex color codes.

## Skip the Doctype

If you prefer to work on your email design in an external HTML design program such as Dreamweaver or Kompozer, you're probably in the habit of selecting all your HTML code then copying and pasting it to your email software's code editor. As we've previously mentioned, the only things you really need to copy are whatever is in-between the body tags, and, if you are using responsive design, the style tags between the head tags. <html></html>, <head></head>, and <body></body> are all superfluous since the email viewing platform is going to use its own versions of these tags anyway. We realize that it is far easier to simply select all, copy,

and paste, but keep in mind that some email marketing systems add their own <html> tags, so it's always a good idea to avoid copying these tags. You should also never copy the <doctype> tag at the top of your code. This one can cause real trouble. Here's a table taken from an email that displays buttons for various social and email sharing options:



And here's how that table displays in Live Mail:



It looks like a serious issue, but simply removing the <doctype> tag will fix it.

## Testing Across Multiple Formats

To ensure you don't encounter any unpleasant surprises, it's always a good idea to test your mailing across as many platforms as you can. There are good online sites that will render your email in virtually any format, from iPhones to Outlook, but we've found that sometimes these get it wrong. While you may want to use these services, we'd recommend sending test emails to several different mailboxes and view them on as many different platforms as possible to ensure the best results.



# HOW TO DEAL WITH MISTAKES

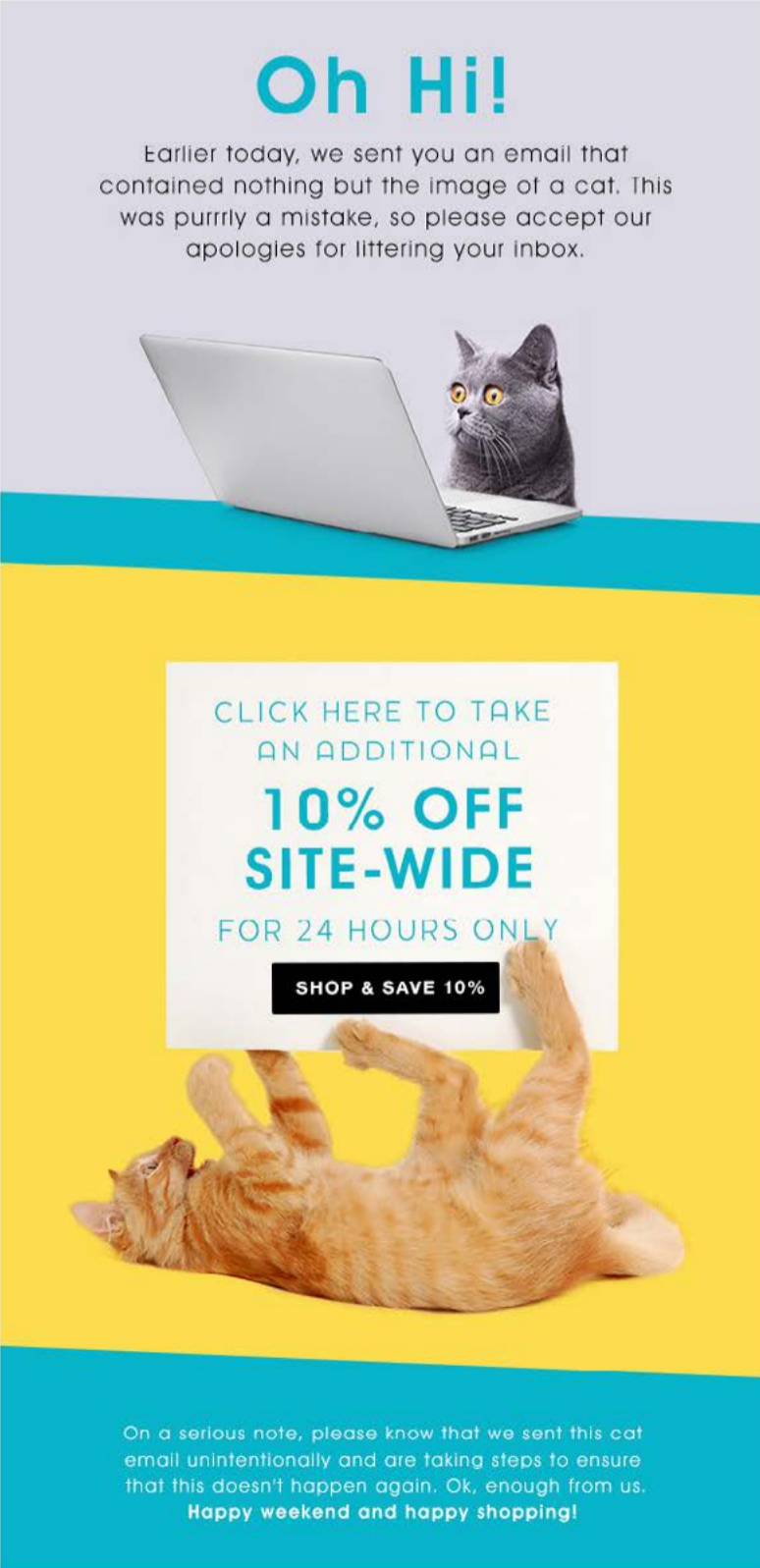
---

Once you've sent out a bad mailing, what do you do? Certainly an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, but that advice won't do you any good once the error has been made. Small errors, such as typos and image misalignments are usually not worthy of sending an apology, unless some actual misinformation was sent. Problems that may have resulted in a substantial drop in recipient response—such as missing images, or a coding error that destroys the message—can be resent with an explanation as to why you are sending the email a second time.

If you do have to send a follow-up or apology email, be sure that the subject line and appearance of the email are different from the first mailing. Most people are likely to ignore an email if they think it is the same as the one they just received. This can lead to delivery problems. Recipients need to be immediately aware that this email is not the same one sent a second time. If there isn't time for a redesign, try inserting a distinctive block of text at the top of the email that explains the reason for the new mailing. Any explanation for the new email should be the first thing they see.

Mistakes that result in emotional reactions or confusion, or contain incorrect information, will require an apology email. This can be embarrassing, but the good news is that apology emails rank among the most opened forms of email. Whether it's schadenfreude, or curiosity as to the nature of the mistake, people can rarely resist opening an email that offers an apology in its subject line.

They can also be opportunities for some clever creativity. When the online store, Fab, accidentally sent a test email to all their subscribers that was nothing but a picture of a kitten, they followed it up with the apology shown below.



**Oh Hi!**

Earlier today, we sent you an email that contained nothing but the image of a cat. This was purrrly a mistake, so please accept our apologies for littering your inbox.

CLICK HERE TO TAKE AN ADDITIONAL **10% OFF SITE-WIDE** FOR 24 HOURS ONLY

**SHOP & SAVE 10%**

On a serious note, please know that we sent this cat email unintentionally and are taking steps to ensure that this doesn't happen again. Ok, enough from us. **Happy weekend and happy shopping!**

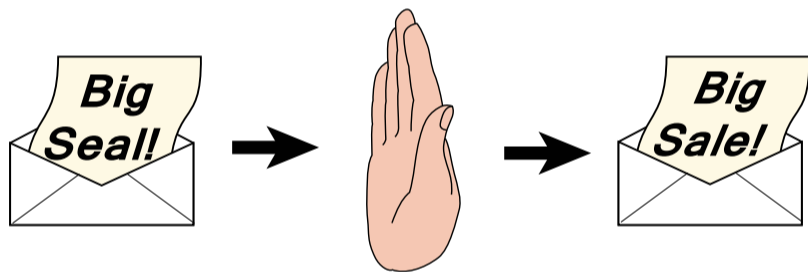
Not only did the folks at Fab respond quickly, but they came back with an entertaining response and a 10% discount as a way of saying sorry. This is nearly always a good idea. Treat your apology with special respect and make sure it contains a compelling call to action. You may never get that kind of attention from some of the recipients again, so you better take advantage of it. It is a great opportunity to up-sell or offer special discounts.

One thing you should *never* do, though, is use an apology subject line as a trick to get people to open your email. People will see this—quite rightly—as a spam tactic and may mark your mailings accordingly. You'll probably get them to open that first email, but it will be the last email from you they will ever open. Not to mention the effect that using a fake apology can have on the deliverability of actual apologies. More important: It's a violation of the CAN-SPAM act (the prohibition of deceptive subject headings), so don't do it.



# IN-PROCESS RECOVERIES USING SYMPHONIE

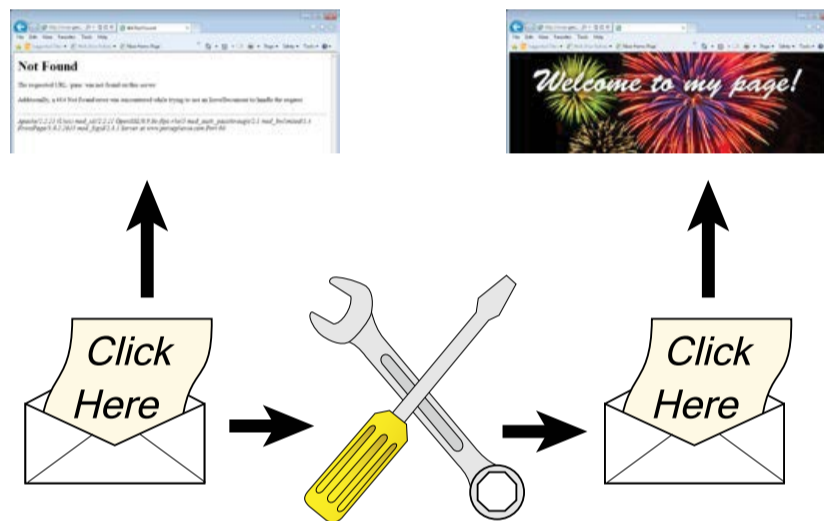
After you've sent an email, it may seem like there is not much you can do to salvage the situation short of sending an apology. If you are using Goolara Symphonie, there are, in fact, two features that can greatly reduce the stress of the situation. One lets you halt the mailing in mid-stream and the other lets you change links after the email has been sent. It is, of course, better if you never have to use these features, but it's nice to know they are there if you need them. The descriptions of these features are based on the Goolara Symphonie interface. Other email marketing software may contain similar features.



## Pause Mailing

After you've hit the Send button, Goolara Symphonie lets you stop the mailing at any point. The most common use for this is when someone has clicked send and immediately realized or spotted their mistake, or if your email volume is high enough that mailings normally get queued (more likely to happen with a high-volume sender). When you halt a send command, you are given a choice between halting the mailing temporarily so that you can fix the problem and continue sending to the rest of the recipient list, halting the mailing and saving the unsent recipients so that you may make more substantial changes to the email and send at a later time, or to stop sending that email altogether.

If you catch the problem fast enough, and you are using Goolara Symphonie, you have the option of pausing the mailing, fixing the problem and then sending the corrected email out to the recipients who hadn't yet received it. Symphonie also keeps track of who received which version, making it easy to determine which recipients will need a follow-up email and which will not.



## Fix Links

If there are problems with your links in an email and you haven't yet discovered them, don't worry, you'll hear about it soon enough. Of course, someone should have tested all the links before the email was sent, we all know that, but sometimes even the best editors miss a link. Many times, recipients will let you know about this problem, but, unfortunately, that sometimes means letting you know in a public forum such as Twitter.

For some email marketing software, a broken or incorrect link can mean having to resend the email with the corrected links. With more advanced email marketing software, such as Goolara Symphonie, you can redirect the link after the email is sent, eliminating the need and embarrassment of a follow-up email.

# SUMMARY

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Everyone makes mistakes. How you should respond to mistakes in your email will depend on the severity of the mistakes and to what extent they interfere with your ability to deliver your message accurately and on time.

The most common mistakes are **typos**. Unless a typo causes misunderstanding in the email's message, it is normally not worth sending a follow-up email to correct. The best way to avoid typos is to have several people look at the finished email before sending.

**Missing images** are another common source of email mistakes and can be caused by several factors. Sometimes these factors are out of your control so it is always important to make sure that your images have descriptive alt tags that explain what the recipient is missing.

If you work in HTML it is important to be careful that you do not mistype your tags. This can result in bits of **code appearing in the mailing**. A missing greater than sign can render an email unreadable. Your email marketing system's preview mode can help you catch these errors before they become a problem.

**Misaligned images** should show up in the preview mode and can often be eliminated by adding "display:block" to the image alignment information. You shouldn't cut an image into pieces unless there is a good reason for it.

If you use **placeholders** such as descriptive titles or "lorem ipsum" text to help you with the initial layout, you must be extra careful

to make sure that you've removed these placeholders from the finished mailing.

**Merge errors** can occur if there are problems with the merge fields or problems with the data in the merge fields. These are extremely rare and generally only happen with poor quality email marketing products.

A more common mistake is to not provide an alternative to field data when that **data is missing**. This can lead to gaps in the email and spaces between punctuation. You can solve this either by using segmentation to eliminate any people who do not have that data, or with dynamic content that changes the content according to whether or not there is any information in that field. Any time you are using data from a field in your email, it is important to choose a few random email addresses for your test previews. This increases the odds that you will encounter potential issues before they become problems.

All **links** within the email should be carefully checked to make sure that they are correct. This is especially important when you are working in HTML, where you are more likely to change an image without changing the href link.

Greylisting can cause a last minute email to **miss its deadline**. Always provide plenty of time for your recipients to receive your mailings. With some advanced email marketing systems, such as Goolara Symphonie, you have the option of assigning a cut-off time for delivery which will help prevent this problem.

If you plan to use **animated gifs** in your mailings, you should place a half-second frame of the important information at the beginning of the animation. Some versions of Outlook will not animate the gif and will only show this initial frame.

**A/B Split** errors are when you send multiple versions of an email to the same person. This is more likely to happen if you are using email marketing software that requires you to create your splits outside of the main system.

**White on white text** is a violation of the CAN-SPAM Act and should be avoided at all costs. Using a background and text that are too close to the same color, while not technically a violation, can lead to deliverability problems and should also be avoided.

You should also be aware that different email clients produce different results. **Gmail ignores style tags**, meaning you can't rely on your @media queries to ensure that your mailing looks good. The worst offender, though, is Microsoft Live Mail, which **does not let you use three-digit hex color codes**,

and can sometimes **ruin the layout when the <doctype> tag is included**.

It is always a good idea to check how your email looks on a few **different monitors and systems**. You should also check how it looks on mobile devices such as iPhones and Android phones as these are becoming more and more common platforms for reading email.

Whether you should send an **apology email** depends on the severity of the error. Only errors that interfere with the intent of the email require apologies. Apology emails have a higher open rate, so they offer a good opportunity to offer discounts or up-sell offers.

If you are using **Goolara Symphonie**, you have two additional tools to eliminate mailing errors. The first is **pause email**, which lets you stop a mailing, fix the problem and continue sending. You can then go back and send the people who received the erroneous email a follow-up if necessary. The second is the **fix links** option, which lets you correct links after a mailing is sent.

Avoiding mistakes and fixing them when they happen is part of the life of an email marketing professional. We hope you found this ebook useful. We've been as thorough as possible and tried to cover the most common mistakes. If you want to discuss any part of this publication, or if you have suggestions for additional things to include in future versions of this ebook, please contact us at:

[info@goolara.com](mailto:info@goolara.com)



## About Goolara

Goolara has been in the email marketing business since 2005. Symphonie, Goolara's premiere email marketing solution is available in on-premise and cloud-based, SaaS deployments. The powerful software features many advanced capabilities, such as full-featured dynamic content, transactional and triggered email, and customizable report generation features. It is easy to use and runs from a browser-based interface using Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer, or Safari. Goolara is headquartered in Moraga, California and can be found online at [www.goolara.com](http://www.goolara.com).

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