

# EMAIL MARKETING FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON



a Maxmail guide

2014  
EDITION



# Greetings!

This holiday season inboxes will expand more than Santa's waistline. Your subscribers are going to be receiving a ton of email so don't send your subscribers junk. The filters will be on high alert as ISPs prevent unwanted email reaching the inbox. We will help you prepare for the holiday season so you can maximize your email marketing ROI.

Create an email marketing plan for the holiday season, content and email engagement will be critical to your success. This guide will tell you what you need to do to stand out in the inbox like Rudolph's red nose in a blizzard, this holiday season.

## What's inside?

- Holiday trends
- Making it to the inbox
- How to make your emails stand out
- When to send your email campaigns
- Promoting your email campaigns

If you have any questions, our support team is here to help or visit our online resource center.

'Tis the season for shopping! [Let's get started](#)

# Need to know holiday trends for 2014!

## [Past Sales Figures](#)

Combined sales for the Thanksgiving weekend fell from **\$59.1 billion in 2012 to \$57.4 billion** in 2013, according to the National Retail Federation. Online sales however had increased by **19% compared to 2012**. Validating the push of online sales was a decrease in foot traffic that was down **11.4%**.

## [The Expansion Of Black Friday](#)

Last year spending on Black Friday surpassed \$1 billion while Cyber Monday sales reached \$2.6 billion, the busiest online shopping day in history. Black Friday is expected to extend over the Thanksgiving holiday to include Black Friday and Cyber Monday in a week a shopping madness.

## [Social Media Influencing Sales Directly](#)

Analysis of social mentions, impressions and sentiment over the holiday season highlighted the influence of social media on sales. Consumers posted, tweeted and pinned their opinions of their shopping experiences and the efforts of retailers, both online and off. Creating positive brand shopping experiences your customers want to share will be key to hitting those sales targets.

## [The Rise Of Mobile](#)

Changes in consumer behaviour in this mobile era provide retailers with the opportunity to engage customers at all stages of the consumer buying journey.

Mobile has added a new channel for customers to shop with. Key shopping days have seen an increase in online sales, Thanksgiving is projected by IBM's retail index to reach **19.7%** increase in online sales year on year. Black Friday sits at **18.9%** and Cyber Monday at 20.6%. From these projections, **49% of sales on Thanksgiving** were from mobiles, **43%** for Black Friday and **55%** for Cyber Monday.

## [Shipping Offers. What Matters To Customers?](#)

How important is free shipping to consumers? Important. 73% of consumers rate free shipping as very important when making online purchase decisions. In a survey by Forrester, shipping costs result in 44% of consumers abandoning carts. Free shipping has become the norm, like discounting and is expected by consumers. Retailers also offered express shipping, guaranteed delivery and same day shipping during the holiday season helping their customers make those sales

## [Omni-Channel Retailing and 'Showrooming'](#)

*'Showrooming'* <Verb>

To visit a retail store to view merchandise and then buy from a competitor, usually online.

i.e. "Let's go showrooming and then order the stuff from Amazon."

Mobile has blurred the lines between online and brick-and-mortar retail. Brick-and-mortar retailers need to integrate in store mobile use as part of an overall strategy to connect with consumers and create an enhanced shopping experience.

Mobile is the consumers shopping tool, used by 85% of smartphone users in store. Many retailers have in store guides, catalogues, QR codes and mobile promotions along with Wi-Fi to facilitate this activity. Create an in store shopping experience like no other.

## [Discounting](#)

Profit margins are squeezed as retailers offer bigger discounts and promotions during the holiday season. Smartphone shoppers are smarter, with 44% making price comparisons in store (there's an app for that) and it is expected brick-and-mortar price matching will become standard. Expectations around sales have come to mean consumers won't get out of bed for less than 40% off. Competition is fierce, online and off.

## [Self-Gifting](#)

Better to give than receive? With the increasing popularity of self-gifting, consumers giving to themselves reached a high last year. Living in a me-centric society, self-gifting has never been more socially acceptable.

# Making It To The Inbox

## [Get on Your Subscribers Whitelist](#)

ISPs only want to deliver email their customers want to receive. Are your subscribers engaged with your email campaigns? ISPs use this information and personal whitelists to determine whether to deliver, block or direct your email to the junk folder.

To improve deliverability, ask your subscribers to add you to their address book. For existing subscribers, remind them in your next email campaign. Modify your subscription **HTML Sign Up Form** and **Autoresponder** 'thank you for subscribing' email campaigns to include "add to address book". Make the request visible, on the first line of your email and not in a footer.

## [Getting opens on mobile](#)

Increasingly emails are being viewed on mobile devices, a figure that is currently at 43%. Your email campaigns need to be designed for mobile. If your content does not display correctly on mobile devices, 75% of mobile users will delete them. If your email campaigns are not designed for mobile, you significantly reduce campaign performance and ROI. Apple users are quicker to read emails while android phone users spend the most time viewing emails.

## [Clean Your List](#)

Subscribers who are not engaged with your emails affect the performance of your email campaigns. A small and actively engaged subscriber list is better than a large non engaged list. Use the Reports section to view the stats on your email campaigns. Low open and click through rates are indicative of an aged subscriber list. Additionally if you have subscribers you have not sent emails to in 6 months or more, be careful. You may want to send your holiday email campaigns to these subscribers but if campaign performance is bad, ISPs may use your From Address or the link to your website as a spam indicator.

# Creating Emails That Stand Out In The Inbox

## [Subject Lines](#)

When it comes to subject lines, the shorter the better with a strong call to action. Relevance is critical and segmenting your list to provide more personalized content will enable you to create highly targeted messages in your subject lines.

## [Preheaders and how to use them](#)

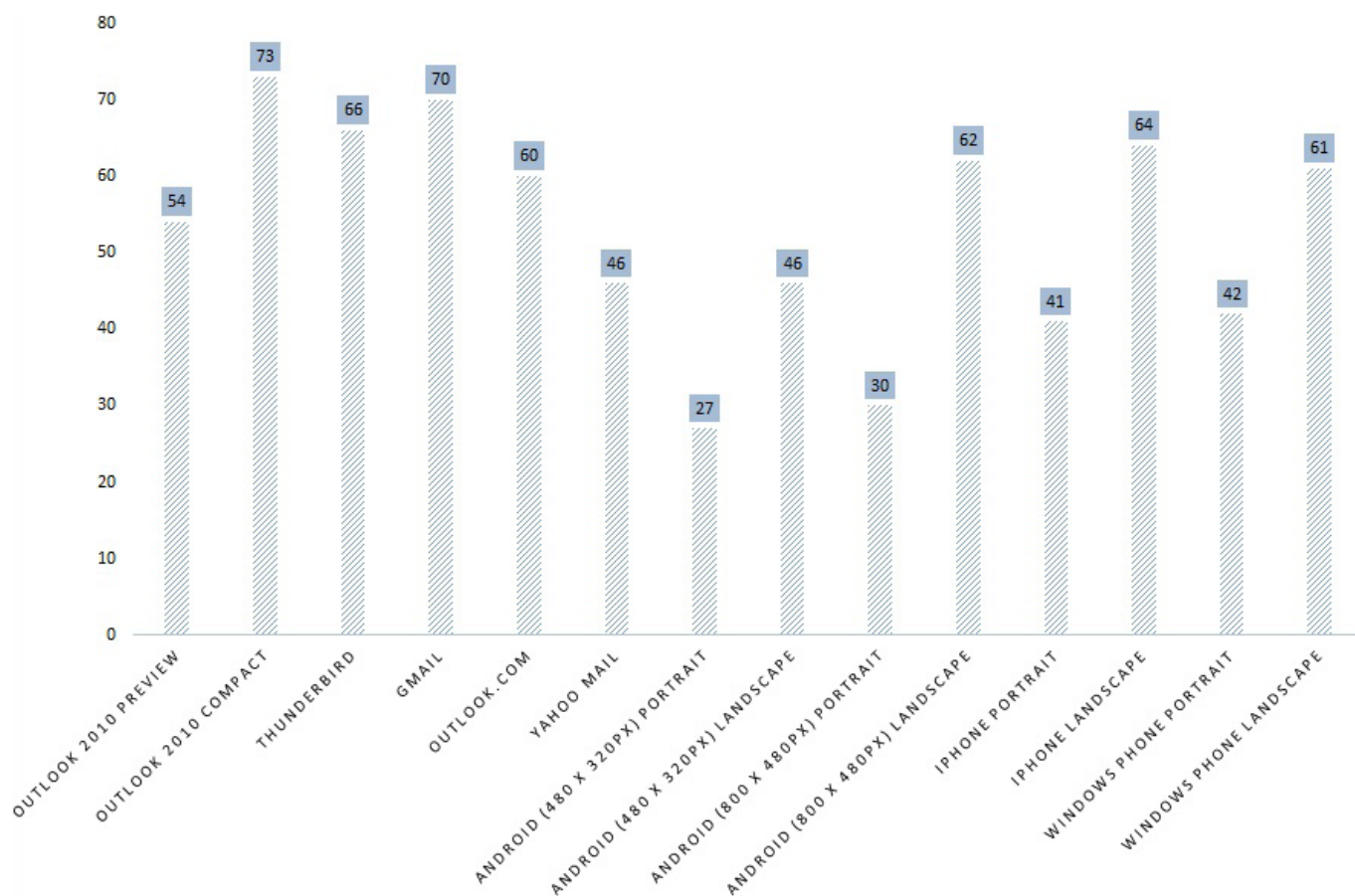
Preheaders are the short summary text that follows the subject line. Most email clients provide users with preheaders that are viewed in the inbox. The preheader is usually the first sentence of your email giving subscribers the heads up on the content of your email. Therefore an effective preheader can be the difference between a subscriber opening or trashing your email.

# Mobile Subject Line Displays

If you are using emails then you know that more and more people are using their mobiles to access their mail. The subject line is now as important as the content it is presenting. Knowing how much space you have can be a life saver.

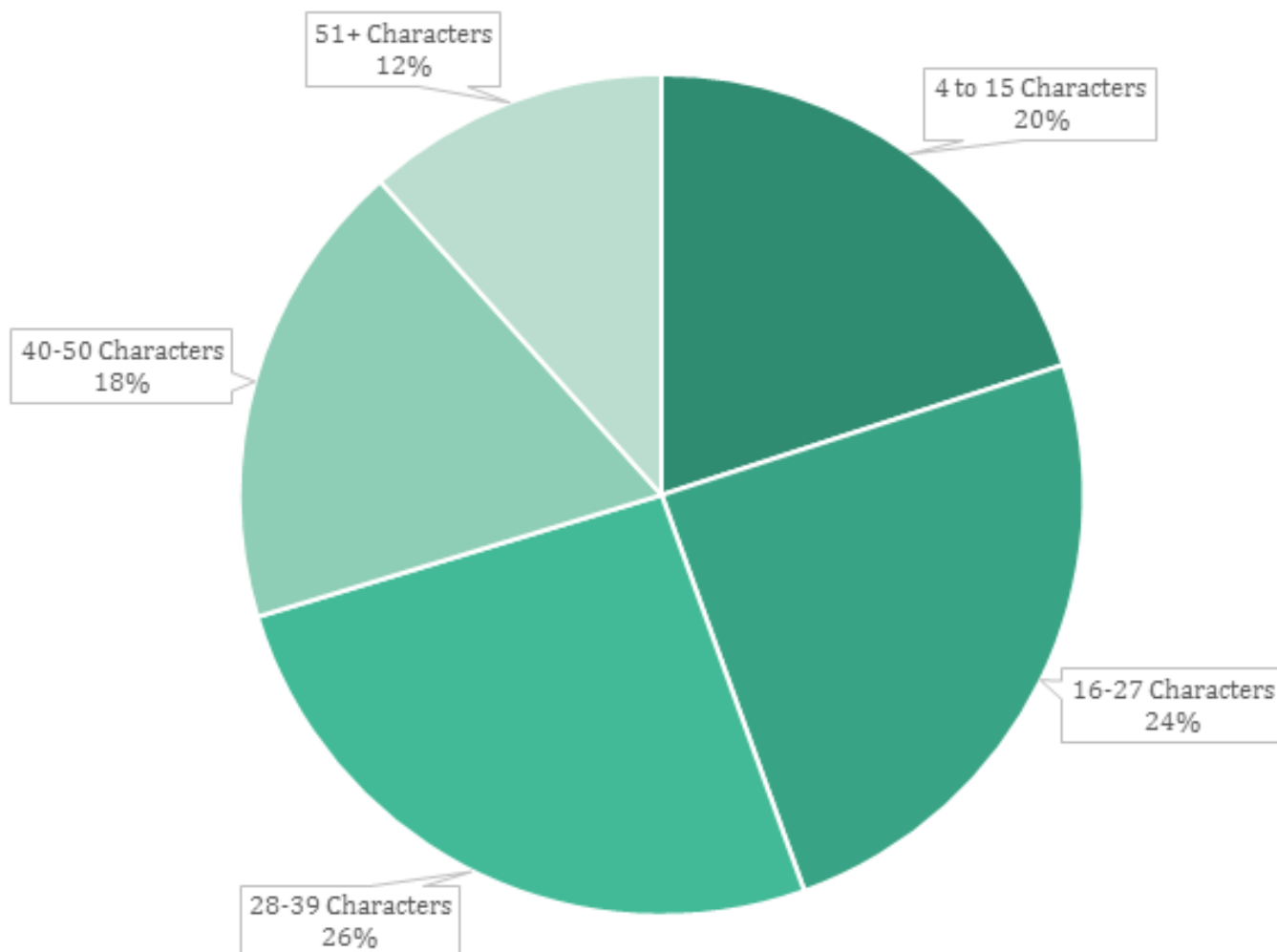
Below is a table with the character limits on the subject lines for the different email platforms.

## Character Length.



While you are at it here's how much the subject line characters influence the click rate.

## Click rate relative to subject line characters.





# When To Send Your Email Campaigns



## [Thanksgiving Holiday Weekend](#)

November kicks off the holiday season and “Black November” messaging has put a new spin on generating early holiday sales for retailers. The major shopping days like Black Friday and Cyber Monday have been combined into a weekend long shopping window. November is the month to start sending email campaigns that get subscribers thinking about gift giving or just shopping for themselves.

### [Ideas for you:](#)

- Shop our catalogue
- Shop these gift guides
- Shop our top rated gifts
  - Shop by price
  - Shop by gender
  - Shop by interest
  - Shop by age

The holiday season is definitely one of the most socially active times. Subscribers may be hosting parties or attending and therefore may need new outfits, holiday home decorations and gifts for guest hosts.

## [What to add to your emails in November](#)

- Add a dedicated holiday shopping navigation bar to your email. Make it stand out by using different color, font and button design.
- Adjust the theme of your email template to include a festive color scheme or different background color to visually reinforce the holiday shopping message.
- Add holiday design elements like snowflakes and gifts for a themed email campaign. Avoid religious images such as the Christmas star, Christmas trees, angels, crosses and so on.
- Use a countdown to create a stronger call to action. For example 10 days remaining until Christmas or 5 days for guaranteed delivery.
- Gift service footers also reinforce to the subscriber that the holiday season is here. Keep your emails tidy by consolidating all your service links in the footer.

## [Cyber Monday and Black Friday](#)

Consider sending your email campaigns ahead of the competition. Many retailers took this approach and sent emails the afternoon of the day before or extended Cyber Monday to Cyber Week. This trend has extended the Thanksgiving holiday weekend into the days before and after it. Consider the following when creating your email marketing plan for the holiday season:

- What days did you send your Cyber Monday and Black Friday email campaigns last year?
- How did your campaigns perform last year?
- Did you set the expectations with your subscribers to keep your email campaigns consistent and avoid high levels of unsubscribes during this period?
- What types of email campaigns were your competitors sending, what were the messages and on what days did they send their campaigns?

## [Christmas](#)

The weeks leading up to Christmas is when things heat up. Retailers sending “12 days of Christmas” campaigns with daily deals opted to run these campaign on their websites or social media platforms to avoid sending daily email campaigns to subscribers.

Consider the frequency of your email campaigns and the effect of high email volumes delivered to your subscribers during the holiday season. Competition for the inbox is high and you risk losing your fatigued subscribers when they mark you as spam.

The trend has been toward more retailers sending season’s greetings email campaigns wishing subscribers “Happy Holidays” or “Merry Christmas”. However, increasingly retailers are pushing their promotional message with season’s greetings as an afterthought. Don’t do it.

Season’s greetings email campaigns need to be optimized for mobile as the opens from mobile devices increase over the holiday period with consumers away from their desks.

## [Post-Christmas](#)

Even before the turkey is cut, the holiday season has shifted from gift buying to self-gifting and clearance sales. As a retailer, use this mind set shift to send season’s promotional email campaigns.

Use email campaigns to encourage gift card redemption. As Target put it so well in their subject line “Your Gift Cards + our clearance = goodness”. Messaging around getting what you really wanted for Christmas, self-gifting and taking advantage of clearance sales as well as upselling provide the opportunity to create compelling email content with strong calls to action during the holiday season.

# Promoting Your Email Campaigns

## [Create virtual catalogues](#)

You can create your own catalogues easily using issue and attach these catalogues within your email. A virtual catalogue not only inspires your subscribers to shop but enables them to shop from clickable links on the images within the catalogue itself.

Ensure your catalogues are sharable so you can take advantage of social shares to further increase your reach and awareness amongst consumers this holiday season. ***Around 73% of email recipients of “social call to action” emails were encouraged to ‘follow’ the brand, according to an email marketing intelligence report.***

## [Send email subscribers to your social platforms](#)

Add social sharing icons to all your email campaigns because first off, it extends the reach of your email campaigns. Tracking these social shares means you can identify your most engaged subscribers and influencers. With this information you can send these subscribers targeted campaigns, create brand advocates and influence sales.

By integrating email and social media, you give your subscribers an option of how they will communicate with you and how they will consume your content.

## [Frequency](#)

Not everyone will want to receive offers and discounts nonstop throughout the holiday season. Use segmenting features to create lists of subscribers who are highly engaged and those who are not to determine sending frequency. Keep in mind, more is not always better and while being top of mind is crucial during this festive period for sales, you do not want to have your subscribers marking your emails as spam. Respect your subscribers and do not send frequent emails in a push to make more sales.



In your Reports you can view subscriber engagement for each email campaign. Segment your subscriber lists by high and low engagement based on engagement metrics such as open rates, click through rates and conversion rates. Ensure you use suppression data to avoid spam complaints.

Happy Holidays From the team at

