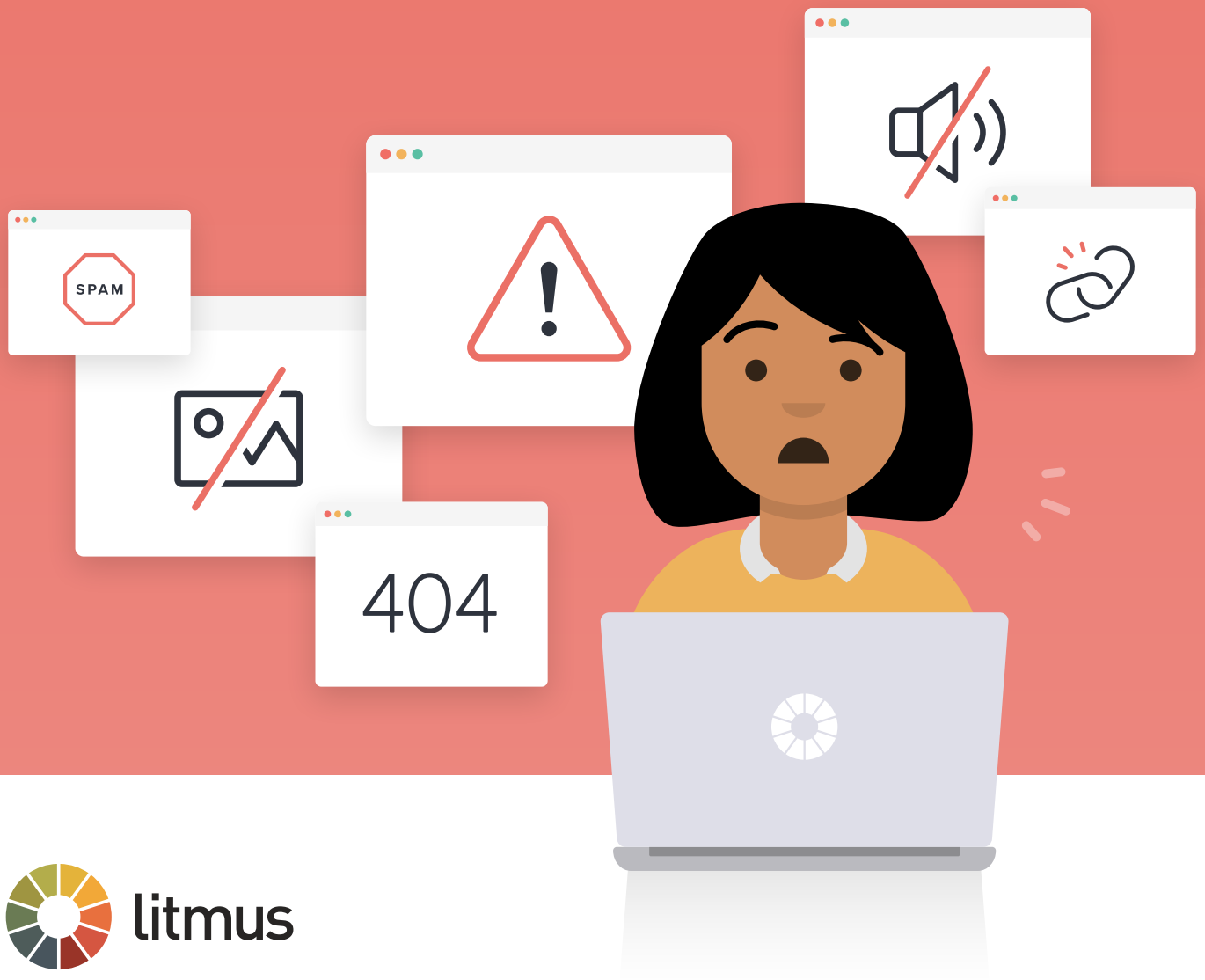


# The Anatomy of a Broken Email

Email issues that make marketers shudder—and how email testing helps you catch and fix them before you send.



# Introduction: Wait, what happened to my email?

We've all been there: You spend a lot of time and effort crafting the perfect email, only to learn that the email that looked beautiful in your email editor doesn't look great out in the real world. It doesn't matter if you're day 1 or day 1000 on the job, an email marketer by trade or by circumstance, a designer or a coder: email mistakes happen to all of us. But it's important to find a way to get ahead of them and fix them before they get a chance to make it to your subscribers and damage your brand.

This is exactly where email testing comes in and saves the day. A thorough pre-send check of your campaigns allows you to catch and fix the email issues that give you nightmares. Regularly testing your emails can help get rid of those pre-send jitters.

Here at Litmus, when an email goes off perfectly, we call that #NoFailMail. This ebook is a love letter to achieving #NoFailMail through email testing and helping each and every one of you create perfect emails that land in your subscribers' inboxes.



*Brands that use an extensive pre-send checklist see a substantially higher ROI (48:1) than those who don't use a checklist (38:1).*

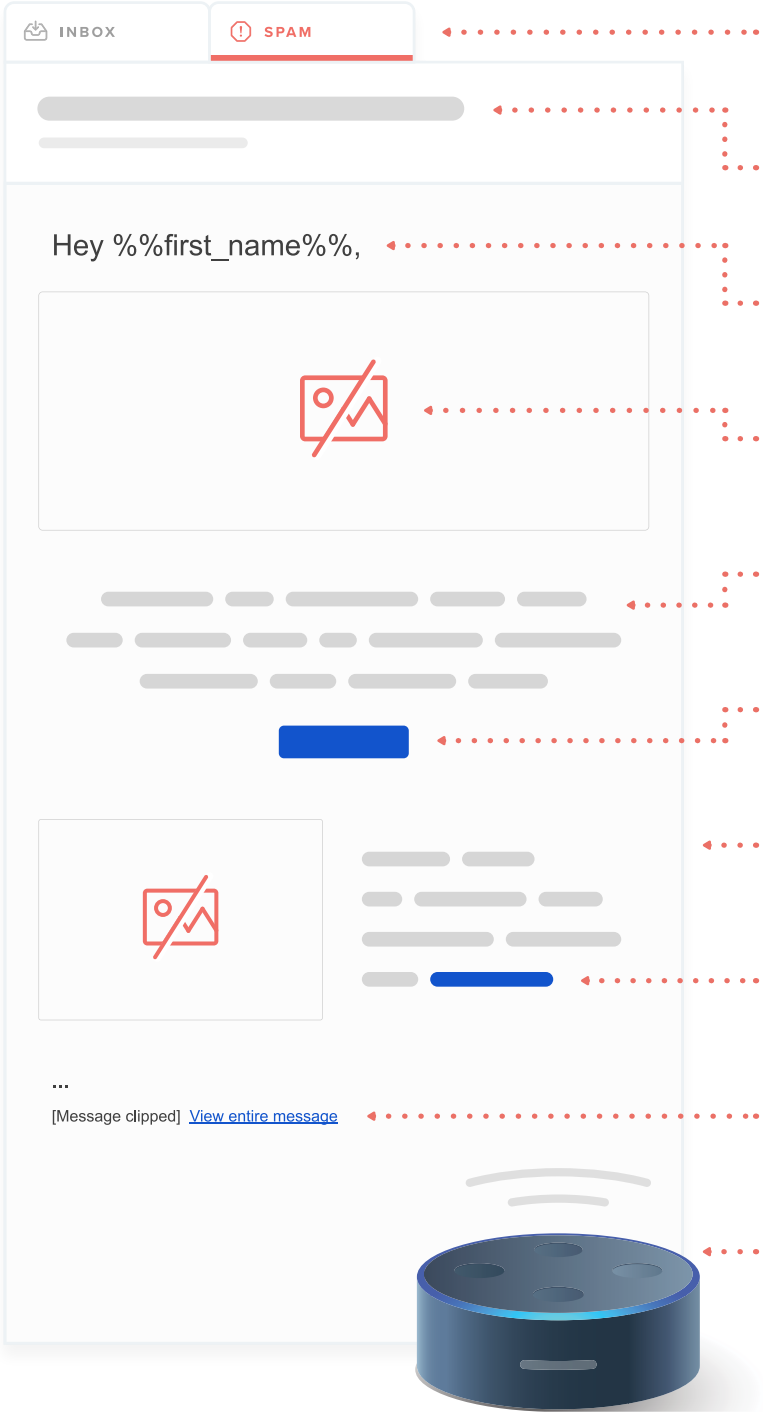
## Never send another broken email

Litmus gives you a guided check of the critical elements that impact email performance. Preview your email in popular apps and devices; validate that links, images, and tracking codes work; and create an incredible email experience every time.



# The email errors that make marketers shudder

Email marketing is complex, and there's a lot that can go wrong. Here are the most common—and most damaging—issues we see in our inboxes. In this ebook, we look at how email testing can fix all of the email mistakes you might come across and help you stop send anxiety in its tracks.





## Using Testing to Piece Your Email Back Together

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Did any of your emails ever suffer from these issues? Mistakes happen, but don't underestimate the damage they can do to your brand in the long term. If you're looking to position your brand as trustworthy and competent, the details matter—and mistakes like these won't work in your favor.

Do you want to send campaigns that are nothing but perfect? Here's how email testing helps you catch and fix any errors before you hit send so you can be sure you deliver a great subscriber experience with every email.

# 1

## My email landed in the spam folder, but I'm not a spammer.

When you create an email campaign, you work hard to craft the right message and the perfect design. But those hours spent optimizing your copy and troubleshooting tricky rendering issues will be all for naught if the email ends up in the spam folder instead of the inbox. You could be sending spam to your subscribers without even knowing it. Too often, brands only notice spam issues once they see their email performance drop—but at that point, the damage is done.

From blacklistings to content, there are a lot of things that can cause your email to be delivered to the spam folder. You'll want to make sure you identify and resolve those issues before you send. We know that understanding email deliverability—SPF, DKIM, DMARC, and all that—can be confusing and hard to keep up with. Using a spam testing tool like [Litmus Spam Testing](#) will do that hard lifting for you, testing your emails against 25+ different tests and walking you through actionable advice for how to

fix issues if you do end up flagging a spam filter or two. It's also possible you've done absolutely everything right and passed spam filter testing, but one of your email's recipients marked you as spam. To help avoid this issue, always make sure you're sending to people that have explicitly opted-in to hearing from you, [make unsubscribing painless](#)—and promptly honor that unsubscribe—and serve up content to your subscribers that they asked for and are actually interested in seeing in their inbox.

### Make it to the inbox, not the spam folder

Identify issues that may prevent emails from being delivered—discover if you've been blacklisted, validate your email authentication, and get actionable advice on how to fix issues before you send with Litmus Spam Testing.

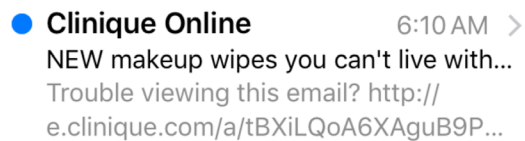


## 2

### My subject line and preview text aren't optimized.

First impressions matter. Once your email makes it to the inbox, the first things your subscribers will see are your sender name, subject line, and preview text. They encourage opens and prompt your subscribers to read your email. Without an open, there are no clicks; without clicks, there are no conversions. So getting your subject line and preview text right is the first crucial step towards email success.

But creating the right subject line and [preview text](#) can be challenging because not all email clients handle subject lines the same way. Some may display more characters than others. Without testing, how would you even know that your subject line gets truncated in some email clients? Depending on the character count, an abbreviated subject line might completely change the tone of your email—[and not in the best way](#).



● **Clinique Online** 6:10 AM >  
NEW makeup wipes you can't live with...  
Trouble viewing this email? <http://e.clinique.com/a/tBXiLQoA6XAgub9P...>

Or maybe you've used emoji or special symbols, and somewhere along the way from building the email and sending it to your subscribers, they

broke—and now they look like a whole bunch of ampersands and octothorpes.



**Victoria's Secret PINK**

**Pack THIS top — it goes with everything! &#128588;**

Testing your subject line is a crucial step to ensure you're avoiding embarrassing subject line mistakes and making a great first impression in the inbox. By using a subject line and preview text checker, you can see what your email looks like in the inboxes of different email clients. You can double check symbol and emoji support, make sure your preview text is the right length, and make any changes you need before sending to ensure your first impression is optimized.

#### Make a great first impression in the inbox

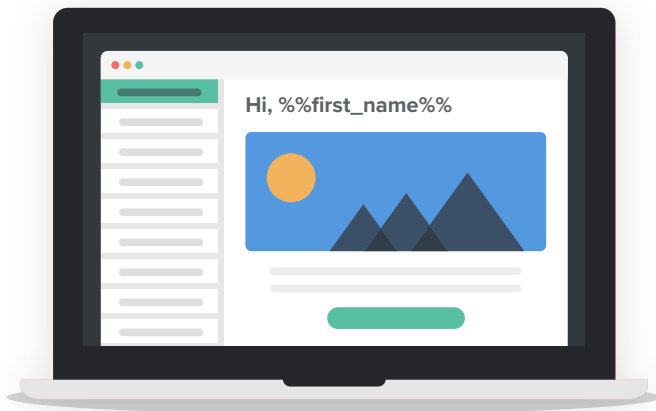
Verify that your subject line, from name, reply-to address, and preview text are all optimized with Litmus Checklist.



# 3

## My dynamic content is broken.

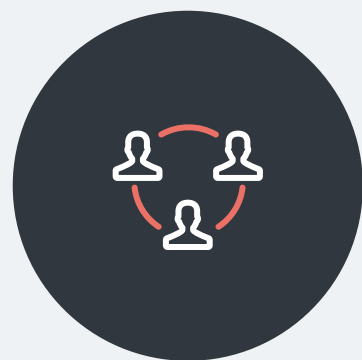
If you have a sophisticated email marketing program, you're probably using dynamic content and personalization. This makes it extra important to double check all of your merge or personalization tags before you send. The famous example is the "Hello %%first\_name%%" fail, but it rings true. Personalization and dynamic content is powerful *when it works*. When it doesn't and there's no fallback in place, it makes your brand look silly and unprofessional.



If you've recently switched ESPs, it's especially important to test your dynamic content. ESPs often have different merge tag identifiers, so you'll have to verify that you made the right changes everywhere and your personalization is still working. You can typically use your ESP to preview your email with a specific prospect record or sample data to make sure your dynamic content will work properly.

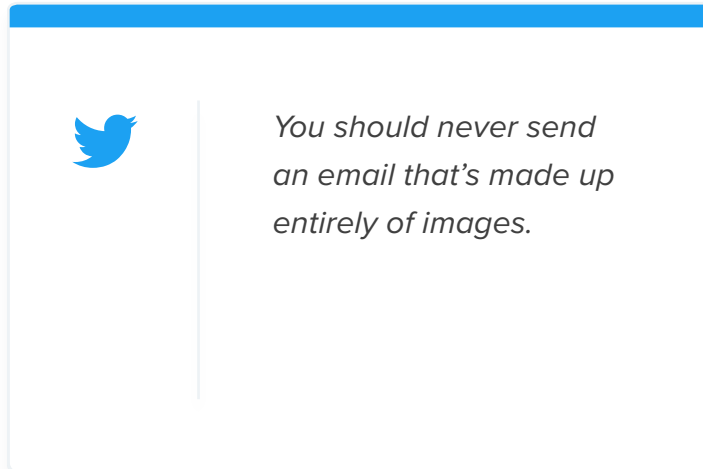
### Litmus + Salesforce Marketing Cloud

With our integration with Salesforce Marketing Cloud, preview and test your personalization strings and dynamic content before you send all in one place.



## The images in my email don't show.

There are so many reasons your email's images might not appear in the inbox. Your subscribers may have set [images off by default](#), a corporate filter may block images, your images might be too large and not load, subscribers might be on the go with weak cell service and not be able to load your images, and so on. Because of the multitude of reasons that images might not load in your emails, we always say: "You should never send an email that's made up entirely of images."



If your email only consists of one large image with all of the content and that image doesn't load, your email appears completely blank—and [that's not a good look](#). We aren't saying don't use imagery at all, but combining imagery with live text is the best way to go. Plus, for the images that you do include, be sure to add alternative text—or alt text—to every image that isn't purely decorative, that would *provide non-repetitive value*

*to a subscriber that cannot see that image otherwise.* Alt text allows you to still give the same value to someone with images off as someone that loaded images in your email.

If you do include images in your email, you also need to optimize them for loading speed. If you're including [retina images for high-DPI displays](#), consider using optimization tools to compress images and avoid bloated file sizes while maintaining quality.

With email testing, you can also play around with [background images](#), [styled alt text](#), and [bulletproof call-to-action buttons](#) and make sure they work across all email clients and devices.



# 5

## We missed a spelling error.

Spelling and grammar errors happen to the best of us and many of them pass through multiple rounds of revisions before they're even caught. The sneakiest ones make it to the final version and take a subscriber calling you out on Twitter to be found at last. While a single typo rarely changes the meaning of your messaging, don't underestimate the damage they can do to your brand. If you're looking to position your brand as trustworthy and competent, the details matter—and typos won't work in your favor.

Thanks for suscribing. Heres what to expect - ...

12:19 PM

See It. Love It. Not Get It

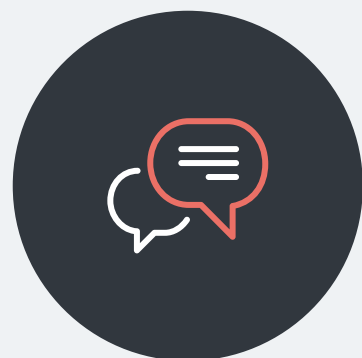
2:00 PM

The best way to catch all of these sneaky spelling and grammar errors is to adjust your email workflow to allow enough time to proofread without rushing. Leave no words unchecked in the subject line, sender name, preview text, image captions, message body, or footer. Read through your email a number of times, just to be sure, and review your templates regularly with fresh eyes.

Plus, two sets of eyes—or three or four—are better than one. Often, it can be really difficult to see errors if you wrote the copy. Tools like [Litmus Proof](#) can help consolidate feedback from multiple people in one place and make it easier to communicate revisions.

### Simplify your feedback & approval process with Litmus Proof

Litmus Proof helps you eliminate the complicated, time-consuming, back-and-forth process of reviewing and approving emails—and allows you to catch errors before you send.

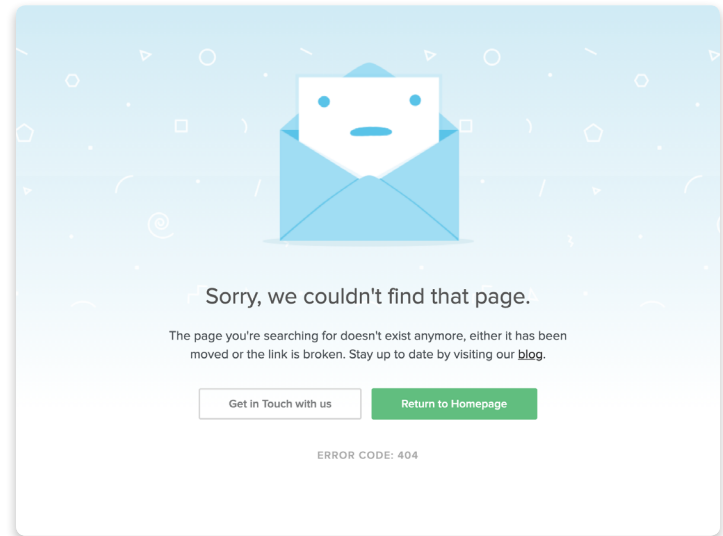


## The links in my email no longer work.

So you sent out an email and one of your calls-to-action links out to a 404 page. Oops! This is an error that hurts. You've managed to trigger your audience's interest and got them to click through your email—but if your link doesn't send them to the right place, there won't be a conversion. Your email failed.

With HTML emails, URLs are typically masked behind a hyperlink or button, making them difficult to verify with the naked eye. But manually clicking and double checking every URL can be time intensive, especially if you're looking at longer emails like newsletters or digests.

Thankfully, email testing can help with this. Automated link checking and tracking will click all of the links in your email and make sure they go to legitimate, loading websites—and it highlights the ones that don't. Maybe there was a spelling error, or maybe the page you linked to doesn't exist anymore. Either way, testing helps identify those 404s before you send them out to everyone.



### Test your links without manual clicking

With Litmus Checklist, you can validate your links and make sure they lead to the right landing pages—without manually clicking every single link in your email.



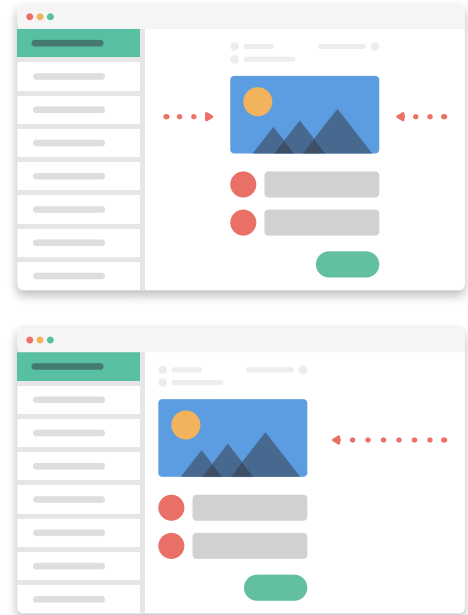
## My email doesn't look the same across all email clients.

Unfortunately, features like background images, web fonts, animated GIFs, and even media queries aren't supported by all email clients and it's not something that's easy to keep track of. Email clients can drop support for features without notice and that can cause major headaches for email designers. These changes are often sprung upon email marketers everywhere that then scurry to fix broken emails resulting from unannounced changes. Because of this, email templates that once worked perfectly before could look completely different—and problematic—now.

Even if email clients didn't drop support for a feature you used, rendering is inconsistent across desktop, webmail, and mobile inboxes. A feature that worked in Outlook's mobile app might not work on Outlook.com. Plus, your email service provider (ESP) can make changes to your code that impact rendering as well—for example, by removing code that they consider malicious.

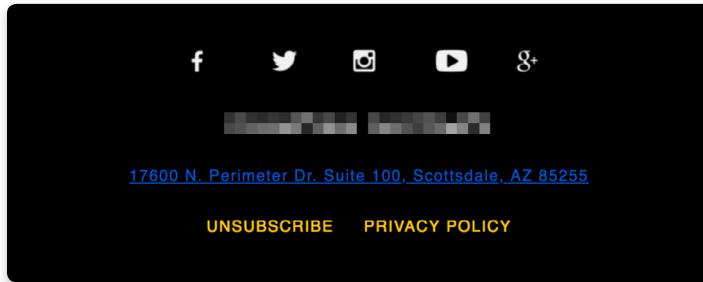
With email clients, operating systems, ESPs, and other factors impacting how an email displays, we've calculated that every email has more than [15,000 different potential renderings](#).

Email testing helps you tackle the challenge of inconsistent rendering across environments. By regularly previewing what your email code looks like across the most popular email clients and devices, you can spot if something that works great everywhere else looks broken in a small handful of clients—and edit your code to fix just those clients while maintaining the experience in the remaining apps and devices.



## Blue links are ruining my email design.

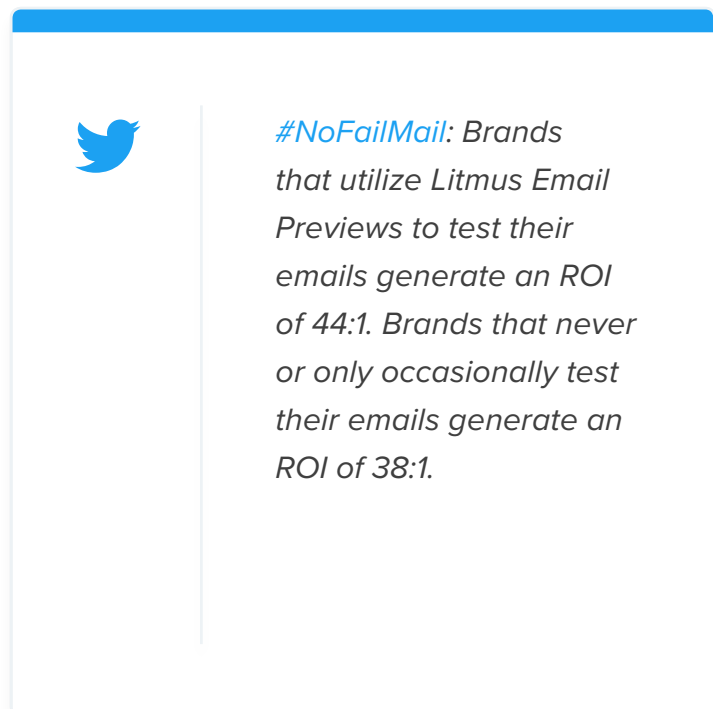
Phone numbers, addresses, and dates frequently turn blue and underlined in emails viewed in Apple Mail, Gmail, and Samsung Mail. This can be a helpful usability feature, but they often cause headaches for email marketers looking to design thoughtful, on-brand campaigns. They're automatically created by email



clients—especially on mobile devices—to provide users with additional options for saving or interacting with information. But often, they don't mesh well with your email's design, and they can be problematic for accessibility if the blue link color doesn't contrast with your email's background color.

Many email marketers want to override the behavior of these blue links to control the look and feel of the design, while others argue that users rely on and expect this functionality and we shouldn't take away the ability to take action on information in an email. We recommend overriding the styles—*but not the functionality*—as the best approach. The best solution we've found is to rely on embedded CSS to override automatic blue linking. If this sounds all a bit over your head, not to worry—we have a [how-to guide on how to remove blue links](#) just for you.

Testing how your email renders across a range of email clients and devices lets you see whether any inbox is changing the color of your links in a way that messes with your email design. That way, you can fix the styling to meet your brand guidelines before you send. Plus, if you're overwriting default styling in any of your emails, be sure to test each one to make sure the embedded CSS isn't messing with your email design any more than the blue links were before. The goal is to maintain your email design while still providing the blue link functionality.



## My email is getting clipped.

So you sent out an email and you noticed the dreaded message in Gmail:

[Message clipped] [View entire message](#)

During the email design and build process, you didn't notice that it was particularly large or long, but it was clipped all the same. In other email clients that try to load the entire email, loading times are slow and potentially cause your subscribers to give up on your email and not engage with it at all.

Your email's compiled HTML size isn't something you think about often or something you can easily calculate, so that's where email testing comes in. With a tool like [Litmus Builder](#), you can take a look at the size of your email and determine whether it's small enough to not get clipped—Gmail clips at 102 kilobytes—or whether you need to make any edits to prevent clipping.

Plus, testing helps you spot any issues that might cause slow loading times. For example, large image files or animated GIFs often lead to images being so heavy that they only load slowly or not at all. Use a tool like Litmus Checklist to quickly spot images that are too big. Then, adjust the image sizes or use a compressing tool (like [ImageOptim](#)) to optimize your imagery for faster loading.

### Test your email in 90+ email clients

See how your email works across dozens of popular desktop, web, and mobile apps and devices with Litmus Email Previews.



## My email sounds terrible on a screen reader.

### [More people are using screen readers](#)

to read their emails: smart speaker users rose to [66.4 million in the US alone in 2018](#), a 40% increase from 2017. Research firm Juniper predicts voice assistants will be used by [275 million people by 2023](#).

Some people rely on screen readers due to a temporary or permanent disability, but others use them because of convenience. Either way, there is an increasing need to make sure your emails are understandable when read out loud, and many emails aren't optimized for audio translation.

Most email templates are built using HTML tables, but those tables are actually meant to be used for tabular data, not layouts. So when we use them for email, we often rely on

nested tables, which means screen readers are going to see a lot of semantic markup—like table, table row, and table cell—and then read that out loud to the user. That's not an experience that anyone wants.

Only [Litmus Checklist](#) will let you hear how your email sounds when read out loud by a screen reader and give you actionable advice to improve the accessibility of your email. It will highlight what sections you might need to edit, whether or not your email contains alt tags for your images, and whether or not your content hierarchy is accessible.

### Test your email accessibility today

Accessibility checks in Litmus Checklist make it easy to test your email against accessibility best practices, identify areas for improvement, and make your emails more accessible to all of your subscribers.





## Every Single Email Deserves to be Tested, No Matter What

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With everything that can go wrong when sending an email, email testing is just as necessary as strategy, copywriting, and design. Think of it as the final piece of the email marketing puzzle, and one that can throw a wrench in your plans if ignored.

Whether you work with templates or build emails from scratch, email testing must be part of your email workflow for every email you send.

Here's the truth: **Every single email deserves to be tested.** Email is a complex channel, and we saw there's a lot that can go wrong with your email. Every email that goes out without testing exposes your brand to the risk of delivering a sub-par subscriber experience. Don't take that risk.

Make email testing a never-to-be-skipped step of your email workflow and help your team understand how important email testing is to your overall program success.

That means making the case to test every single email, even if...



### Your email uses a pre-tested template

Templates are wonderful for streamlining your email marketing process and maintaining a consistent style across messages. But while they can reduce your workload before hitting send, they aren't immune to error.

Although templates keep the bulk of the email's contents the same, no two emails are identical. Images, content, and subject lines change constantly—and where there's change, there's room for failure.

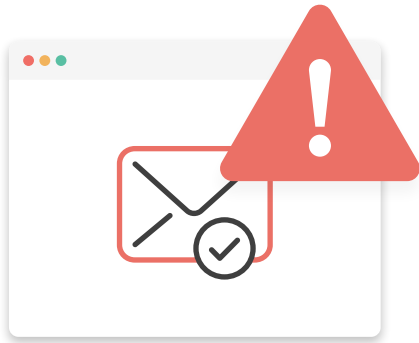


### You're sending a transactional email

Part of the allure of transactional emails is that they seem the most "set-it-and-forget-it" of them all. After all, they're designed to be created and then automatically triggered when a customer makes a purchase, abandons a cart, or celebrates their birthday.

The only problem is that email clients can drop or change support of critical HTML elements in your email without warning. If you don't [review and test your transactional emails regularly](#), you may be sending broken emails to customers at critical times.





## You tested this email before

We've said it before: The world of email marketing evolves quickly. An email that looked great yesterday might be broken today. What made it to the inbox last week might get stuck in a spam filter now.

Whether you realize it or not, each time you choose to test an email, you're making sure each email that goes out the door is nothing but perfect. It's because of you that all the work that went into designing, writing, and coding a campaign doesn't go to waste because of a small oversight. The time you invest in testing each email your team sends out is paying off. [There are ROI stats to prove it.](#)

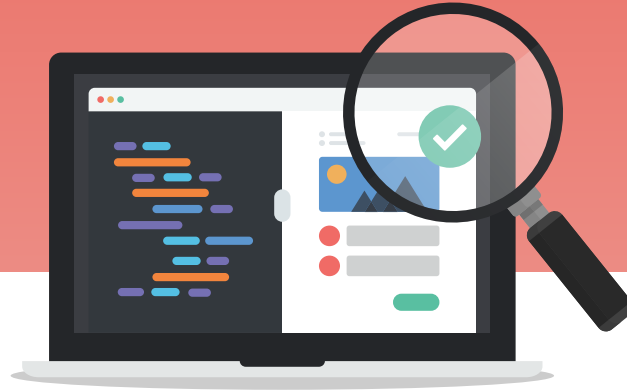
**With the right tools, you can streamline your testing process and send error-free emails that perform every time.**



***#NoFailMail:** Brands that invest the time in extensive pre-send testing see a 26% increase in ROI.*

# Become a better email marketer with the Litmus Platform

Litmus makes it easy to build, test, and monitor every email for the best results—and stop those email nightmares in their tracks.



## Litmus Email Previews

Check how your emails appear and function in 90+ email clients and devices worldwide, so you can ensure they will look great in every inbox.

## Litmus Checklist

Ensure your images, links, and tracking are working properly; your subject line, preview text, and email load times are optimized; your email is accessible to all subscribers; and more.

## Litmus Builder

Empower your team to build incredible campaigns in less time with integrated Email Previews, support for snippets and partials, one-click CSS inlining, seamless integrations with popular ESPs, and more.

## Litmus Spam Testing

Know if you're blacklisted, identify potential deliverability problems, and fix issues before you hit send and land in the spam folder.

## Litmus Proof

Get feedback on emails in one place, improve collaboration, and empower your team to drive business results by getting more emails to market, faster.

**Never send another broken email**



## About Litmus

Litmus helps more than 250,000 marketers make email better. They use the Litmus Platform alongside their existing email service provider to ensure a consistently great brand experience for every subscriber, work more efficiently, accelerate campaign performance, reduce errors, and stay out of the spam folder. For more information about Litmus and the latest email news and trends, visit [www.litmus.com](http://www.litmus.com).



## About the author

Whitney Rudeseal Peet is the Digital Marketing Specialist at Litmus. Her average day at work involves writing and editing Litmus' content in addition to wrangling social media across multiple platforms. When she's not at her desk, you can find her reading a good book, enjoying a glass of wine, and planning her next trip to London.



## About the designer

Chase Carpenter is a Junior Designer at Litmus. With a passion for simple illustration, subtle detail, and concise visual-communication, he strives to make the Litmus brand as approachable and memorable as it can be. When away from his computer, he can be found venturing out into the mountains around Salt Lake City to meditate or taking in a baseball game with a beer.