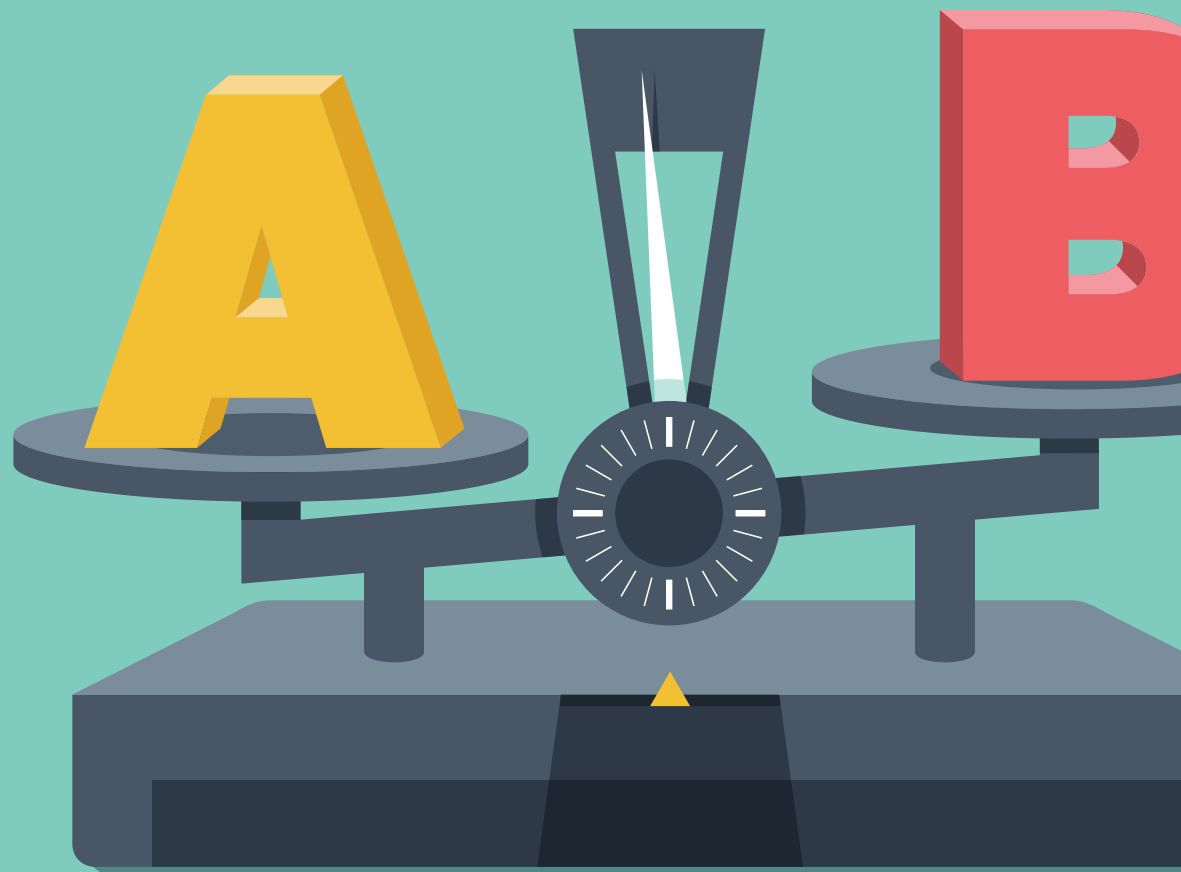


# Why A/B Testing is Critical to Email Campaign Success



**By systematically running controlled campaigns, A/B testing helps you determine which message or offer will resonate best with your audience.**





# What's Inside

Testing is so important because often what our gut instinct tells us is not what the test results reveal. This is because our users may think and react differently than we personally would. By testing to effectively target your audience, you'll experience increased conversions and higher user satisfaction.



01. What Do I Test?
02. How Do I Test?
03. Key Takeaways



# What Do I Test?

You've heard the saying, *it's not what you say, but how you say it*. With email, it's pretty similar. There are three primary elements to test with email:

» Content » Design » Timing

*What you say* refers to the content. *How you say it* references the design of your email. And *when you say it* is all about delivery. Here are some things to think about when it comes to A/B testing your emails.

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## Content Testing

### ① From Name and Address

The "From" address can be a great way to build a relationship with your user if you remain consistent. Determine whether your emails should come from a person, or your brand. Just be sure that you never send an email from a "no-reply" address. This immediately creates a barrier between you and your subscriber. Your "From" address should invite communication, not deter it.

### ② Subject Lines

This will be the first message users read as they decide to open your email, so make sure it's compelling enough to drive that open. Test the length of your subject line as well as your call to action (CTA). Also try adding personalization and other characters like brackets to communicate the main point of your message.

### ③ Headlines

After the subject line, the headline is the first thing people see when they open your email. Make sure it communicates the main message and stays consistent with your subject line. Consistency in your messaging is key, so if you get creative in your subject line, mirror that creativity in your headline. Always makes sure to maintain that balance because if your message is confused...so are your readers.



#### ④ Imagery

The old adage, “A picture is worth a thousand words” is true with email too. Make sure your images reflect your message and your brand. However, images can also be problematic when it comes to email, so ensure that you’re not relying *solely* on an image to earn a response. Not all email readers automatically display images, so add smart copy to the *alt tag* of your image to encourage the image download from your users.

#### ⑤ Calls to Action

Since the CTA will ultimately drive the response, make sure it works. Test buttons, links, wording, and colors. An effective CTA can exponentially increase your response rates. (Check out our guide, [How to Build a Strong Email CTA](#) for more tips.)

#### ⑥ Links

Including too few or too many links can have a negative effect on your email campaigns. Try testing different versions of your emails with more and fewer links to see what the right ratio is for your campaigns.

#### ⑦ Length

Determining how long to make your email can be determined by clicks. If people are clicking on the first link, then you can shorten your email. If they are scrolling to the bottom, try moving your link up to see if you can earn a faster response. If you’re receiving no clicks, you may need to shorten your message or include more link opportunities.





## Design Testing

### ① Template

Oftentimes, senders use one template and never bother to test various versions to see which performs better. This is a wasted opportunity to discover what placement your subscribers prefer. Test several templates, but then stick with your winner, so that your emails maintain a consistent look and feel.

### ② Font and Font Size

Are your emails written in such tiny type that your user has to strain to read it? Or, is the font so big that they have to scroll to get through a two line message? Stick with standard font sizes and standard fonts, only going outside the box if it adds value to your message. Remember, certain fonts might not translate in some readers, so take that into consideration when designing your email.

### ③ Colors

Colors can create an emotional brand connection with your user, so employ them wisely. Most companies use their brand's color palette in their emails, but others apply color around their message. Whichever you choose, make sure that you have a thoughtful reason for using your color choice before implementation.

### ④ Images

Equally as important as the prose you put on the page, are the images you choose to complement it. These include photos, illustrations, borders, bars, and any non-textual elements in the email. (Because it's easier on the eye, rounded corners in email have pretty much become a standard.) Have you re-visited the placement and usage of these elements in your emails lately?

### ⑤ Formatting

Should you bold, underline, or use italics? These are all questions that need to be answered through testing. These formats are usually used to highlight important ideas, so you may want to use them sparingly for emphasis.

### ⑥ Plain Text

As odd as it may seem, plain text emails need some designing too. Formatting here is key. Long links can be distracting to the text, as will weird text breaks that often go overlooked if plain text emails aren't reviewed with the same diligence as HTML. Be sure to test plain text against HTML emails to see which earns you a greater response rate. The results may surprise you.





## Time Testing

### ① Time of Day

The best time to send your email is when your users are *most likely* to open it. Therefore, try sending your campaigns at different times in the day (i.e. morning vs. afternoon) to see when your open and click rates are highest.

### ② Day of Week

The same holds true for day of the week. Most senders tend to send emails Tuesday through Thursday. However, this may or may not hold true for your business. For instance, your response rates may soar on the weekends when your users are more inclined to engage with your app.

### ③ Frequency

Frequency should be determined both by the type of email communication you send (daily deals, weekly round ups, seasonal newsletters, etc.) and by your engagement rates. If your subscribers are opening and clicking, your frequency (and the relevancy of your content) is likely healthy. If you're seeing low engagement, perhaps you should scale back and reassess your content. SendGrid's [Event Webhook](#) helps you dive into your customer engagement data and can help steer your deployment frequency.





# How Do I Test?

When it comes to testing your email, you want to make sure you have a large enough sample to get a good understanding of how successful your campaign will be for your entire audience. And keep in mind that the smaller the change you want to make, the larger the sample size you need to verify its accuracy. Here are your three primary options:

## » Send to a Test Batch

**If you're testing a single campaign, focus on a sample.** The number of recipients will depend on the size of your list and what you are trying to achieve. For instance, send a test to approximately 10% of your list, assuming that equals at least a couple thousand people. Again, you want a large enough sample to get an accurate picture of success. Once you've determined the winning campaign, deploy it to the rest of your list.

## » Perform a 50/50 Split

**If you're testing time sensitive offers, test different offers.** Set up two versions of your email campaign and split your list in two. Make sure this split is done at random as you don't want to skew your results. In this case, focus on conversions as your metric for success and use these results to determine your future offers.

## » Monitor Opens and Clicks

**If you're testing automated emails or transactional emails, focus on the results.** Since the content in these emails remains consistent, you can focus more on response rates to test success. Test content as your starting point and test in stages, starting with simple elements like subject lines. Once you've mastered open rates, move on to the elements that will drive more clicks. Remember that results from opens indicate performance of subject lines while clicks are more a reflection of your content/links/CTAs.

You can also split test within SendGrid's Marketing Email product. You can create multiple versions of a marketing email that based on recipient activity, will automatically determine the winning variation which will then send to the remaining recipients. You can learn more about A/B split test with SendGrid [in this video](#).







# Key Takeaways

- » **Only test one variable at a time.**  
Otherwise, you won't be able to conclusively know which elements worked better.
  - » **Test a large enough sample.**  
This way the data will truly reflect your user base.
  - » **Test at the same time.**  
Unless you are testing time of day, deploy your campaigns at the same exact time. Otherwise, you risk adding another variable to the mix.
  - » **Test often.**  
You always want to have the best data available to increase response rates.
  - » **Pay attention to the data.**  
You're doing this for a reason, so trust and use your results wisely.
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## Get Started with SendGrid



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### About SendGrid

SendGrid helps you focus on your business without the cost and complexity of owning and maintaining an email infrastructure. We manage all of the technical details, from scaling infrastructure, to ISP outreach and reputation monitoring, to whitelist services and real-time analytics. We offer world-class deliverability expertise to make sure your emails get delivered, handle ISP monitoring, DKIM, domain keys, SPF, feedback loops, whitelabeling, link customization, and more. To learn more, visit [www.sendgrid.com](http://www.sendgrid.com).