exclaimer™

The 17 Email Signature DOs and DON'Ts
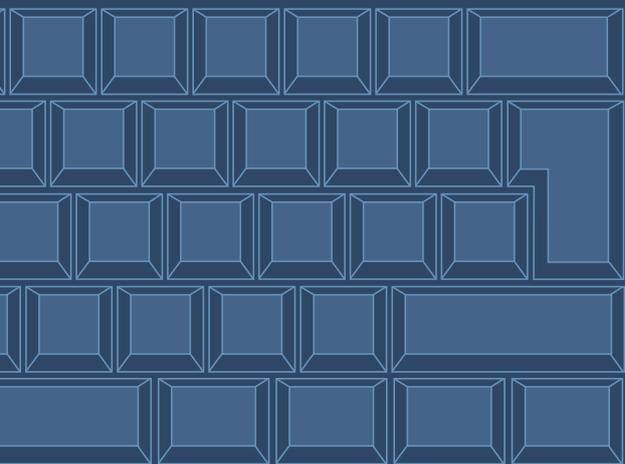
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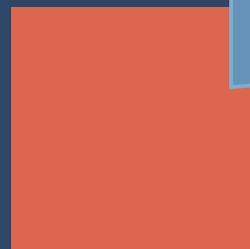
As an email signature software company, we see a lot of signatures. We see what a lot of companies get right and what they get wrong.

So, in time-honored fashion, here's a checklist of the most common points that even smart, savvy signature users get wrong.

1. Do Make It Social

Social media is on the mind of every marketer right now – use your signature to connect social with mail. Firstly, give contacts a taste of your content: put a recent Tweet or a blog post snippet (the whole post won't fit) under your signature.

Then, add a social media link so they can Twitter Follow or Facebook Share in a click. Unilever added a Follow link and went from 40,000 Followers to 235,000 in just 10 months – for free.

2. Don't Do It Yourself

The number one biggest mistake on signatures is inconsistency across the company because each employee has made his own. One might have a logo from 1994; the next might be using a logo that's 1,013 pixels wide – beside a misspelled address.

Use the same template across your company. Make sure every signature matches a professional, stylish format that you've approved.

3. Do Use The Right Tools

It sounds vague but keep it in your mind – it's a signature, not a word document, not a web page and not an image on its own. If you know HTML, code it accordingly – avoid some of the pitfalls we'll detail further on.

If you don't know HTML, don't use Microsoft Word or Outlook to draw your template. They'll format it in their own way: any other program (or another version of that same program) may interpret the layout differently and display it incorrectly.

4. Do Keep It Slim

Whether it's Outlook's Preview Pane before you open a message or the window after you double-click on it, very wide signatures will not render well.

The industry standard is about 650 pixels – we'd even say that a signature should go a little thinner, at 600px, to make sure nothing gets lopped off the edge.

5. Do Use Tables

For all your layout needs, turn to tables. Remember, you can simply leave the borders transparent if you don't want to see a grid – we're just talking about using them to place each part of your design.

That way, we know exactly how wide it will be – and no more – and we know that each part of the signature will appear in the right place: no job titles getting squashed together or images appearing inexplicably in the wrong spot.

6.   Do Make It Simple

Keep the layout as robust as possible – let the images and links make an impact, not the way they're arranged. If you try something over-the-top or ambitious, be prepared to back it up with lots of testing.

In fact, if you have a decent way to test how it will look in lots of different email clients (Outlook, Apple Mail, Gmail), then be our guest – but be sure that it's solid enough to stay well-presented in lots of circumstances.

7.   Don't Use Bullets

Bullet points tend to render strangely from client to client – what Gmail thinks of as a bullet point differs from Outlook's definition. To keep them all happy, just avoid bullet points altogether.

If need be, use different rows in your table to get that list look.

8.   Don't Animate It

Avoid animation in signatures. In Outlook, in most corporate email clients, you will not be able to watch an embedded video – you won't even see the animations in gifs.

9.   Do Use Inline CSS

This is more technical. Inline CSS and email HTML go hand-in-hand. A lot of standard, W3Schools-approved tags won't work with the programs we use to read email.

Get around them by using Inline CSS. If you're not technical, use an editor made specifically for signatures that will automatically turn your design into code that follows all these rules.

10. Do Write Full-Length HTML

For the same reason, write out the HTML longhand. A lot of email platforms won't recognize the shortcuts you're used to.

For the non-developers among us, that means you shouldn't just try to use a direct marketing email CMS or Word to build your template – use a tool that was made just for email signatures.

11. Do Use Jpegs

PNGs are not right for mail. That may defy some of the accepted practice you've been taught about the web – of course it won't, this isn't a webpage: it's an email.

Choose jpegs and gifs over PNGs under almost all email circumstances – and don't forget to use the '-nosend-' tag on all images, so they'll appear correctly in the email.

12. Do Restrict Image Dimensions

Don't just rely on the size of the image being correct – hardcode exactly how wide and high it will be in HTML. If you don't, Outlook might render the image strangely.

Again, for the non-coders reading this, that means you shouldn't just use a web CMS or Word to try and draw out your signature – it doesn't work like that.

13. Do Find The Right Ratio

Try not to let the images overwhelm the text – too large, too numerous or too tacky. Don't lose the email in that signature. It's hard. Every email is different: what looks right with blocks and blocks of text will look strange under a single sentence.

Change how your signature looks on replies. The first email in a conversation may be longer, so a larger, bolder signature can make a professional first impression. Then, on replies, use a simpler, slimmer set-up to remind, not repulse.

14. Don't Forget Alt Text

Remember image alt text – you never know where your mail may end up after it's forwarded. With alt text, anyone who gets that email can hover over an image and get an idea of exactly what it does – I say 'does' rather than 'is' because each image in your signature tends to perform a function.

A 'Like Us On Facebook' alt text on that social media link or a 'Sign Up For Our Event' on that banner for your upcoming exhibition can explain what that icon offers. It makes your links a little more inviting.

15. Do Shrink Your Links

Most links will be behind images – they're fine as they are. But when you have links visible in the signature – say a 'Web: Exclaimer.com' in your contact details – you'll want to keep them as short as possible.

For many, that could be using great resources like Bit.ly and Ow.ly. If you have a web admin, use a shorter URL and ask him to set up a redirect that takes visitors to the real page – which can have as long and complex a URL as it needs.

16. Don't Break The Law

It's not exciting, but it's the law – legal disclaimers are required in many parts of the world.

Like CAN-SPAM stating you need your physical business address on mail or Circular 230 forcing you to declare what's advice and what's opinion - look into what laws apply to you and what's needed to comply with them.

Watch out for these regulations and stay on top of changes to your business – you never know when that new service you offer or that new market you've entered might take you into new legal territory.

17. Don't Worry

Signatures may be a massive asset but they don't need to be a massive effort. There are a few smart ways to manage yours – without bothering your IT department or your colleagues with updates, changes, corrections and so on.

Check out our introduction to managing signatures with software, what the different types offer and how your business can benefit.