Adobe

Rules are meant to be broken. That goes for email, too.

A cheat sheet on email marketing rules—and when to break them.

When it comes to email marketing, there are a lot of conflicting messages—always do this or never do that. Just think about all those best practices you've seen floating around online. Whether it's a dated PowerPoint presentation, an old guide, or an archaic eBook, there are so many resources out there that are just plain outdated. And they promote rules that used to be true but maybe aren't anymore.

That's why we've made a list of email marketing "rules" that are begging to be broken. And by "broken," we mean "tested to see what works for you and your audience—and adjusted accordingly. " Because in all honesty, you shouldn't assume that all these rules will automatically work for you, even if they worked for someone else. So test. Tweak. Break the rules. And figure out the best approach for you and your community.

Let's break some rules.

1. Never use words like "free," or "deal," or "discount" in an email subject line.

2. Always keep your email subject lines between 30 and 50 characters.

3. Always use double opt-in when growing your list.

4. Never use a pop-up (or pop-over) to collect email addresses.

5. Never send an email that's composed mostly of text.

6. Never send an email that's composed mostly of images.

7. Never send an email with one big image.

8. Always use the recipient's first name.

9. Never use more than one call to action.

10. Never use all caps in an email subject line.

11. Never use animated GIFs in the body of an email.

12. Never make your unsubscribe button obvious, like placing it at the top of an email.

13. Always send an email during the middle of the week.

14. Never send the email at the end of the day.

15. Never send more than one email per day.

16. Never have fun.

Context is king.

Ultimately, it's up to you to determine what's going to work for your audience and situation —and what won't. After all, you know them better than anyone. For example, if you design a pop-up that offers real value to your audience, it might help you boost the lead count. Or you could test an all-image email if you believe that a completely visual story communicates your point best. And maybe throw the word "free" into that subject line to see how people react. The point is, be aware of these rules—but because absolutes like "never" and "always" can stunt creativity with unnecessary limits, you should feel empowered to break them when it makes sense to do so.

Check out what Adobe Marketo Engage can do to help you step up your email marketing game.

Get details