



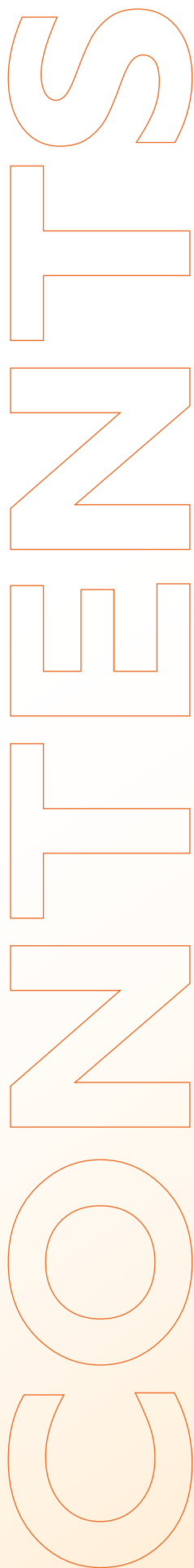
# MOBILE MARKETING ASSOCIATION

White Paper

## **The Essential Considerations for Mobile Email**

July 2013

Issued by the MMA North America Mobile Email Committee



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## Introduction

Mobile devices are revolutionizing the way people experience email today. The use of mobile email continues to grow as more consumers seek to stay informed through their smartphone, tablet, or other connected devices. With 88% of people checking their email via mobile devices daily, it's imperative that marketers develop a strategy to produce emails that are optimized for mobile. In fact, more Android devices are registered every day (1.3MM) than there are weddings, babies born, and deaths COMBINED each day globally... x2!

However, there is no single quick-fix or solution for effectively delivering email to mobile. As you'll find in this primer, effective mobile email delivery requires a strategic organizational commitment.

The Mobile Marketing Association's Mobile Email Committee has collaborated to produce this primer to help brand marketers, their agencies and enabling partners with essential, preliminary guidance and sound practices to optimize their email for mobile. To advance the collective body of knowledge as things mature, The MMA will also actively solicit feedback from brands, agencies, and practitioners to establish "best practices" and ultimately "industry standards."

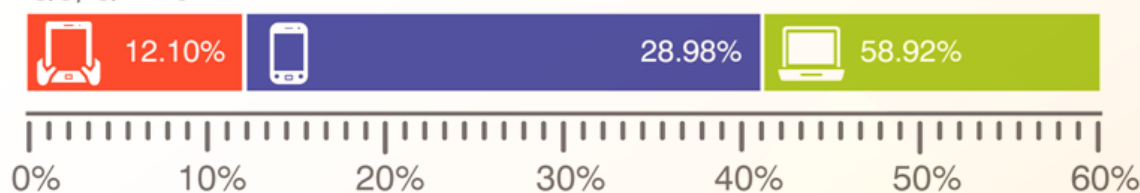


## Defining the Mobile Email Landscape

2012 saw smartphones become the device of choice for mobile subscribers. It was also the amazing “Year of the Tablet.” Technological advancements in connectivity and speed, coupled with decreased cost and increasingly friendly usability, are fueling the notable shift to mobile devices as the primary access point to all things digital. With this shift away from the desktop, subscribers are transitioning many productivity activities to their mobile devices. Accessing, reading, and engaging with email on mobile devices represent one of the most significant changes in user interaction with email since consumer email was introduced in the late 1990s. According to Google’s Our Mobile Planet, email is the number-one smartphone activity—over 75% of smartphone users access their email via their phone. Recent analytics from Litmus tells us that over 40% of all emails opened in January 2013 occurred on a mobile device. Knotice found similar results, noting the increase in open rates, up from 27% just a year ago, with some industry segments currently surpassing the mobile email tipping point of 50%.

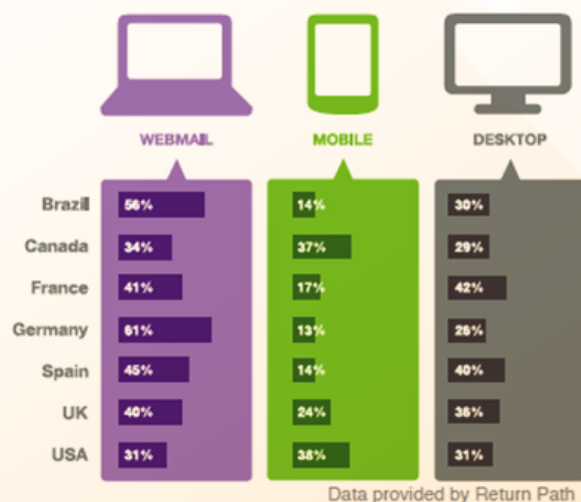
## Mobile Email Opens by Device Type

Q3/Q4 2012



Source: Knotice Mobile Email Opens Report: H2 2012

## GLOBAL EMAIL OPEN RATES



## EMAIL CLIENT MARKET SHARE

(results based on email open rates)



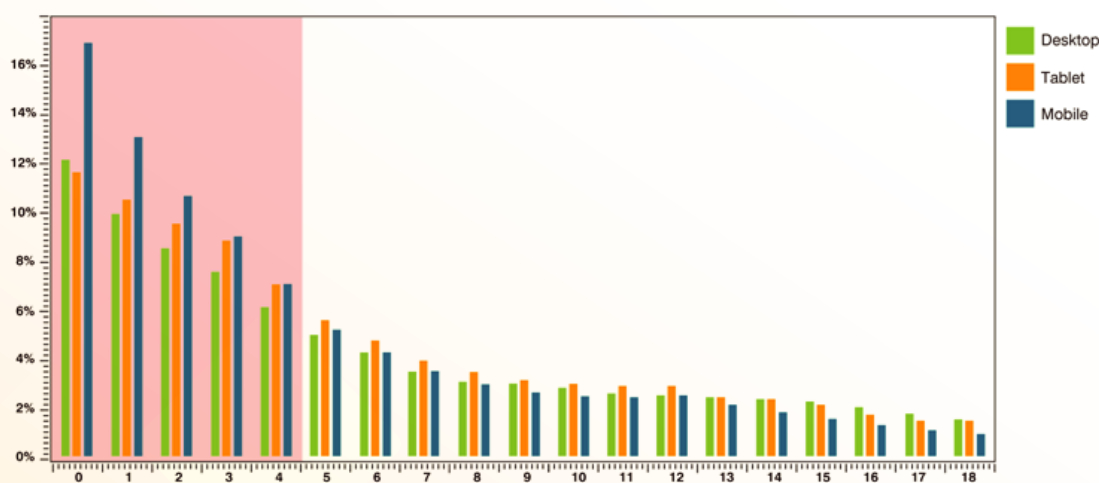
For current industry averages each month, view <http://emailclientmarketshare.com>



## Opportunities and Challenges

With these new realities, we must consider new mobile-specific email consumption tendencies. According to the Mobile Opens Report, the distribution of opens occurring on phones is more heavily concentrated within the first three hours following email delivery, declining quickly before falling in line with the distribution trend of desktop and tablet opens. Email engagement by phone is significantly higher in the first 90 minutes, with negligible differences between phone, tablet, and desktop email engagement after approximately five hours. This presents opportunities in planning outreach strategies for time-sensitive use cases like flash sales, transactional messaging, event-related updates, or perishable inventory, where historic patterns indicated actions would be taken across a wider window of time—often when those limited windows had closed.

Percentage of Email Opens Within Hours After Send (by Device)



Source: Knotice Mobile Email Opens Report: H2 2012

Today's consumers don't consciously differentiate a PC from a phone or from a tablet when interacting with a brand. They do opt for convenience—and mobility provides just that.

The theory that consumers will open their email a second time on a PC or other device if the mobile version does not look good is a myth. Knotice's report for the second half of 2012 shows only about 2% of openers will reopen that email on another device. In recent analysis of the retail industry, nearly 98% of email opens are occurring on only one type of device. Further, if there isn't a seamless optimization of the mobile post-click experience, you have missed your window with a mobile opener, and they will become "revenue lost."

This fragmentation leads us to one of the biggest challenges facing the email industry today: Mobile devices lack cross-platform hardware and software-rendering standards (e.g., HTML, images). There's no one-size-fits-all solution accessible to everyone. While there are platform solutions that allow reliable prediction of device opens based on past behavior at the user level, most developers can't rely on a device-specific email rendering—it does not scale and there is little to no quality control or service.

## Mobile Email Design and Development Considerations

### Design Considerations



Mobile email users are focused on convenience. It may be as likely to find them reading email at home on the couch as it is to find them boarding a flight. The average mobile user focuses on an email message only 3-5 seconds. To capture this shorter attention span, messages need to be clear and concise and design layouts need to be tailored for quick scanning of key information.

A number of design and coding approaches can be put into practice, each with varying degrees of considerations including:

1. **Desktop Centric** – Design is optimized for a subscriber's viewing experience on a desktop.
2. **Mobile Aware** – This approach uses design-only tactics to make simple improvements to enhance both the desktop and mobile experience and provide a single visual framework that works in both environments.
3. **Responsive Design** – CSS media queries are added to the email to detect screen size, then overwrite styles to adjust text size, frame width, image size, etc. for a more usable experience on a mobile device. While the CSS code enables the technical execution, the design is optimized for each specific viewing environment.

DESIGN  
CONSIDERATIONS

## 9 Tips For Mobile Email Design

1. Keep it simple and intuitive. Minimize clicks to navigate the content.
2. Remove non-essential elements—design for mobile devices with images turned off.
3. Divide content into clear sections to optimize decreased screen real estate; use a one- or two-column template.
4. Form fields should be 5 characters or less; Subject lines should be 35 characters or less.
5. Stay away from large images in the upper left area.
6. Avoid using images as the important or only call to action.
7. Place CTA and offer "above the fold."
8. Allow enough space to click accurately. The button height should be 40 px to 45 px with 15 px for padding.
9. Fonts should be no smaller than 14 px for body copy and strive for headline fonts at 22 px+.

## Your Mobile Approach

- Use optimized email templates or adaptive design for the device that recipients use the most often.
- Offer a device-optimized, focused click-through experience with dynamic content specific to what you already know from your direct interaction with that person. Don't just redirect to your mobile home page—or worse, your .com Flash-based splash page.
- Offer easy-to-consume content, messaging, offer redemption, and ordering options.
- Preload forms with as much as you can support (e.g., buying, shipping, even payment method used).



## Development Considerations

When it comes to the formats behind mobile-optimized emails, there are varying techniques to consider. The most basic techniques are Plain Text and Mobile Aware; both of which feature a simple email layout design. More customized techniques include Scalable formats where the email width adapts to the screen size of the device and Hosted Version, which is designed to accommodate a smaller width than standard practices, yet flexible enough to use with a desktop.

## Responsive

As marketers consider what mobile users need, many are exploring a responsive user experience approach. This involves a combination of strategy, user experience, design, and technology that brings mobile email to life. Marketers can select elements that they want to appear, where they should appear, and in some cases, what should be removed.

Responsive email development and design incorporates all possible elements of an email into one HTML file, relying on media queries to present or suppress individual content/design modules based on the size of the screen used to view. The illustration below shows the different content options packed into the HTML of a single email, and how each renders by device. Responsive helps optimize for most anything, and it's particularly useful when the device type is unknown.

### Individual Modules

A - Mobile View B - Desktop View



Content elements are broken out into individual modules. Each module's size, layout and content is adjusted to match its intended viewing environment (mobile vs. desktop).

### Combined Modules



The CSS3 media query within the email determines the appropriate content to display based upon the screen size.

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## CSS3 Media Query

Built on a flexible grid, the CSS3 media query can create alternate styles of email based on the viewing environment, allowing for elements to adapt and change. The tag alerts the device to change the logical window size when displaying a page. The media query detects screen size, allowing you to apply different styles to the content to adjust text size, frame width, image size, etc. The technology is smart enough to determine by rules when to roll back to the standard version of the viewing environment when it does not support media. However costly, it is effective when marketers have a large mobile audience and can invest in a specialized mobile experience.

CSS3 media queries help create a fluid layout that is continuously responsive to the user's display dimensions by targeting the maximum and minimum widths, rather than specific, device-sized orientations. Media queries are fast, resizing content to fit without having to refresh the page. When you use a responsive grid layout, you only need a single template for all views, so this means production teams can be more efficient, with less maintenance of the code base. It also minimizes the need for back-end developers to get involved with the presentation layer.

### TIPS FOR RESPONSIVE DESIGN

**Responsive design is more complicated than designing separate emails—there are more working parts that require attention.**

- Leave HTML text as standard as possible. Use font sizes that are whole numbers. Don't reduce the spacing between letters and don't tighten the line height.
- Schedule extra time for design, development, and testing.
- Avoid background images, animated GIFs, and image maps.
- Limit CSS and implement as inline CSS.
- Use tables for formatting and specify background colors. Beware of inconsistent grids.
- Use ALT text for images that contain critical copy, but leave the ALT text blank for non-essential images.
- Set the width and height for all images in the HTML.
- Don't trust special characters. Use the ASCII HTML code to display special characters.

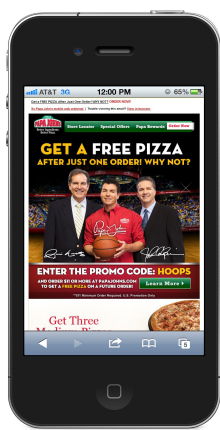
While the CSS3 media query is a great solution when done right, it is important to note that it's not a universal solution. If a device is not supported and the query is not read, the desktop version will automatically be displayed. Keep in mind that both the desktop and responsive design versions of an email will display when the email is forwarded. Also expect increased investment in how you are coding each email if you are going to take on responsive design.



## Inbox Device Detection Using Pixel Lookup

When the device requests email images from the server, a clear pixel is used to perform a server-side lookup and deliver the OS/device-specific assets. This approach is most often used to drive downloads to an OS-specific app, to a specific page within an already downloaded app, or to a click-to-call functionality relative to the call to action. If a desktop is detected, a clear pixel remains and the email is unchanged. This approach requires creative teams to produce assets specific to each OS they wish to support, which adds time and cost to development efforts.

## Optimized Mobile Landing with Device Detection



(Image provided by  
Exact Target)

Users click through an email to the hosted mobile page, which automatically resizes for any device type. This can be a hosted version of an email, landing page, or mobile product page that connects to a mobile website. It provides an optimized viewing experience for every OS and device across more than 8,000 devices.

Not all smartphones are created equal, and marketers need to optimize their mobile email accordingly. The chart below is a quick guide to mobile optimization by platform.

## Mobile Optimization By Platform

	iPhone	Android	Blackberry	Windows
<b>Without optimization</b>	Zooms out to show the entire desktop version of the email	Increases font size and requires panning to view the entire email	Displays a stripped down version of the full desktop email  Older models (4.5, 5) have to enable viewing email as HTML. Newer models (6+) use webkit	Zooms in, but allows zooming out to view entire email
<b>How to optimize</b>	Load CSS dynamically using a media query to reduce the width of the email	Design email to have 1 column—or - 2 columns that are 320 wide each  * Padding in gmail 10px left 12px top	Send both text and HTML versions. Newer models (6+) render HTML email very similar to Android.	Same as Android
<b>Ideal width of design</b>	350px wide	320px wide	60 chars per row (text)  320px wide (6+)	320px wide (For modern Windows 7 phones)

(Source: Creative Lift)

DEVELOP  
EFFECTIVE  
OPTIMIZATION

## The Industry Landscape

There are multiple technology and coding solutions available to execute a mobile email design. Designing a separate mobile experience for users doesn't have to have severe cost implications. By making some moderate coding changes, marketers can adapt their emails to general mobile parameters. In many cases, the benefits of taking on the investments associated with mobile-specific design and technology may be worth it.

## Conclusion

Consumers are mobile, and as such, smart marketers must adapt their email strategies to meet them in their preferred channel. While no "silver-bullet" solution exists today, marketers who take the time to properly consider the strategy will gain a competitive edge and remain relevant with consumers' changing needs.

Consider email an extension of your overall approach to mobile or vice versa. Email and mobile teams need to work together to bring the best possible brand experience. Links and destinations tied to the email must take the audience to a mobile-friendly experience. Consider how mobile users manage a full inbox, the different ways they evaluate post-click experiences, and the functional limitations they may encounter. How can you address those issues and leverage them to your advantage?

No matter what mobile-optimized email best practices marketers implement, it's important to plan, design, code, and test any new approach. Optimizing mobile email requires more than a code change or a refreshed look and feel. Companies that plan their optimization efforts can not only uncover new ways to make their brand stand out, but they can effectively boost their returns, reach traditionally hard-to-engage audiences more effectively, and keep subscribers engaged.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

**When considering ways to optimize email for viewing on the mobile device, marketers must answer some key questions before proceeding with their mobile email strategy:**

- Am I designing an email exclusively for mobile?
- What delivery platform am I using, and can it handle the scale I need?
- How and who will I be using to track and measure mobile email?
- What percentage of my subscribers open email via their mobile device?
- What device type do my subscribers use (e.g., iOS, Android, Windows7, Blackberry)?
- What is the path to conversion in my email process?
- Does a campaign-specific landing page make sense in the scenario?
- Is the destination website optimized for mobile?
- What is the capacity and skillset of the resources that will be designing and coding mobile email?
- Does my production process and content urgency allow for the additional time needed to develop and test for mobile?

The answer to these questions will help the marketer choose an appropriate design, delivery and measurement approach.

## Who We Are

The MMA wants to acknowledge the important contributions of all of the following companies, with special thanks to Epsilon's Christina Torok for her original writing and content organization, Knotice's Dave Lawson for his wonderful support in design and final edits and to Creative Lift's Tim Carr for his oversight and objectivity. Thanks also to the other committee members and the expert sources they represent in the mobile email segment.

### **MMA North American Members – Mobile Email Committee:**

Creative Lift	Knotice
Epsilon	Responsys
ExactTarget	ReturnPath
The Agency Inside Harte-Hanks	

If you'd like to get involved with the committee or have comments on this primer, please contact the committee at [committees@mmaglobal.com](mailto:committees@mmaglobal.com).

## About the Mobile Marketing Association (MMA)

**Mobile Marketing Association (MMA)** is the premier global non-profit trade association representing all players in the mobile marketing value chain. With more than 750 member companies, the MMA is an action-oriented organization with global focus, regional actions, and local relevance. The MMA's primary focus is to establish mobile as an indispensable part of the marketing mix. The MMA works to promote, educate, measure, guide, and protect the mobile marketing industry worldwide. The MMA's global headquarters are located in the United States and has regional chapters, including North America (NA), Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA), Latin America (LATAM), and Asia Pacific (APAC) branches. For more information, please visit **Mobile Marketing Association (MMA)** [www.mmaglobal.com](http://www.mmaglobal.com).

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