The Email Personalization Handbook: Tips, Tools, and Examples

How to craft memorable brand experiences that resonate with subscribers

Building bridges: How personalization fosters human connection

Imagine a chef preparing a meal with your favorite ingredients, or a playlist finely tuned with your most-loved songs. This is the very essence of personalization—it's about delivering an experience so tailored and unique, that it feels distinctly yours.

As marketers, we should aim to nurture that same human-to-human connection whenever possible—especially in an era dominated by artificial intelligence (AI). The average person sees 10,000 ads daily, and cutting through the noise requires more than just delivering marketing messages; it requires making an effort to establish a real, human connection (and that means going beyond the MERGETAG).

Not convinced? Let's look at the facts:

- **80% of consumers** are more likely to make a purchase from a brand that provides personalized experiences.

- **Personalized emails deliver six times higher** transaction rates than emails without personalization.

- **64% of emails are sent by companies that** leverage personalization using dynamic content. This means personalized emails are an industry standard.

Good news: as email marketers, this is where our medium shines! In this guide, we'll explore the landscape of personalization, along with a comprehensive showcase of the possibilities that email personalization brings to the table.

Table of contents

Why personalization—and why now?

The [2024 State of Email](#) Survey found that 56% of marketers personalize less than 25% of emails they send. And we don't blame them! [25% of marketers](#) say one of the biggest challenges with personalization is the collection and organization of data—the most important piece to getting started.

Plus, email marketers are getting asked to do more. In 2023, 23% of marketers said they had up to 5 emails in production at any given time—and in 2024, that percentage went up to 46%.

That's where a solution like Litmus Personalize comes in! Complete with a collection of quick-start templates helping you create an impactful experience in the inbox, without all the heavy lifting and manual work each time. [See how it works](#) ➔

Part 1: The personalization renaissance ✨

It's [a new era](#) of email marketing—one that demands personalization to craft exceptional customer experiences.

1 Marketing in a post-generative AI (GenAI) world

In 2022, GenAI saw its most significant surge in popularity, thanks to the [launch of ChatGPT](#) and DALL-E 2. While AI seems to be sweeping the globe, a considerable amount of people are still warming up to it.

[Barna reports](#) about a third of Gen Z (29%) and Millennials (32%) are more skeptical than excited about AI, and nearly half of Boomers (49%) say they are skeptical of AI. Given the sentiment around AI, marketers can expect "[an increased demand for verifiably human content](#)."

In short: incorporating a human touch to digital experiences, such as the inboxes of your subscribers, will not only set you apart but also become increasingly vital.

2 Email clients hunker down on security

In February 2024, Gmail and Yahoo instituted a new set of rules for bulk senders, with the goal of creating a safer, more enjoyable experience for Gmail and Yahoo users—one with less spam, malware, and phishing attacks.

The key to getting your email delivered to the inbox? It's all about sending relevant and valuable content to your subscribers. This principle sits at the heart of successful email marketing—even with proper authentication, failing to deliver content that's relevant could put your emails at risk of being marked as spam.

How can you measure relevance? Your engagement metrics! They can help paint a powerful picture as to what your subscribers are resonating with the most.

In short: engagement metrics—like click-through rates (CTR)—will be important to keep a close eye on.

Actions speak louder than words, and your emails can prove it! Tap into a plethora of engagement-boosting and trust-building tactics with Litmus Personalize. The best part? No coding experience is required to use them.
See how it works ➜

3 In: Zero- and first-party data. Out: Third-party cookies.

Despite persistent delays, the phase-out of third-party cookies is on the horizon. In early 2024, Google launched a new feature called Tracking Protection, designed to curb cross-site tracking.

What does this mean for marketers? Personalization strategies that have depended on third-party data will have to change. To facilitate a smooth transition, marketers should increasingly focus on their email programs as a proactive means to gather first-party data, ensuring its stored and segmented effectively.

In short: now's the time to double-down on building zero- and first-party data. And email is the perfect place to do that (think: click-capture strategies like live polls and sentiment trackers).

An email marketer's most dynamic friend 🤝

Part 2: Getting started with dynamic content

"Hello, %%first_name" is cool and all, but have you tried going *beyond* the MERGETAG?

While we're big advocates of going beyond first name personalization, regardless of all the bells and whistles you might add to a personalized email, it all begins with the data. To craft even the most basic personalized emails, it's important to not only collect data but also to store it securely and organize it in a way that's useful to your email marketing strategy.

One of the hurdles that might intimidate you is getting started—whether that's identifying the data sources, getting buy-in, or simply finding the time. Keep in mind: while there are different ways to use dynamic content, from easy to advanced, *anyone* can get started with creating personalized emails using dynamic content! All it takes is a good look at how your data is structured.
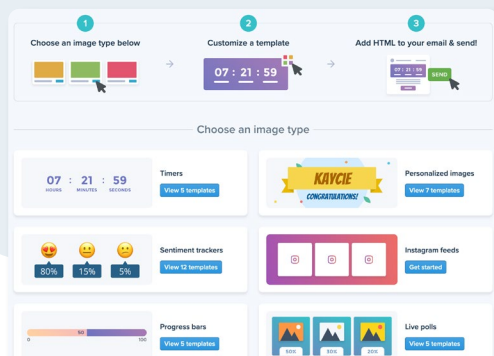
Did you know: with a tool like Litmus Personalize quick-start templates, no coding experience is required to create things like live polls, personalized images, and sentiment trackers. Our quick-start templates make it easy for anyone on your email team to use.

Try it for free ➜

The silver lining: once you get your data in order—and understand how and when to collect data—you'll unlock the full potential for personalization in your email campaigns (more on that later!).

Understanding how and when to collect data will determine the level of personalization you are able to apply to your email campaigns ⬇️

Start with:	Work up to:
Name/email	Subscriptions
Location	Memberships
Shopping preferences	Loyalty programs
Purchase history	Browsing history

You need to deliver personalized emails by leveraging your data. But how does it all work?

How it works

[44% of marketers](#) say they build two to three versions of every email on average, while 18% build four to six versions. While we applaud the effort it takes to create multiple versions of each email, it isn't the most practical or scalable approach to personalization. That's where dynamic email content comes in!

Dynamic email content: email content that changes based on the subscriber's personal data profile such as preferences, behavior, geolocation, and demographics

Dynamic email content adds value to your email marketing strategy by making sure each email feels tailor-made when it's opened. This can include simple personalization such as first name, countdown timers, subject lines, or personalized copy. You can take things further by showing product recommendations based on site behavior or cart abandonment, offering promotions, special offers, providing weather-related suggestions, and using personalized imagery.

Why dynamic content works

- It allows you to design engaging customer experiences with ease. Build emails that truly engage your subscribers to boost brand perception and loyalty.

- It creates email experiences that drive action. From time-sensitive sales to low-inventory availability to limited-time event registration— building a sense of urgency encourages subscribers to take action and engage with your brand.

- It eliminates the hassle of creating endless email versions in every campaign.
Save time by letting the power of dynamic email content do the hard work for you, so your team can focus on innovating your email strategy.

- It incorporates personalization. Using a content automation solution (like [Litmus Personalize](#)) empowers marketers to easily connect content sources—like CRM data or product feeds—to create dynamic and compelling messaging that goes beyond basic segmentation.

Preparing your data

Step 1: Start with the basics

Navigating the rules of data collection, privacy, and permissions can be complex. For that reason, we suggest beginning with two types of data: zero-party and first-party. These are directly given to you by your audience.

Zero-party data is information that customers willingly provide to you. This includes details like their name, employer, title, location, age, or birthday, typically exchanged for a free item or content. Interactive quizzes are also a popular method for gathering zero-party data by asking consumers about their preferences to guide them towards relevant products or services.

First-party data is also collected directly from your audience, but it dives into user behavior. This includes information captured from interactions with your website. While it may offer deeper insights compared to zero-party data, both types are voluntarily provided by individuals.

Step 2: Assess how your data is structured

Start by exporting your data from its source and examining the column headers. Take note of the information being collected.

Then, delve into the terminology used to label the data to familiarize yourself with its language. Identify any similarities in the types of data, even if they're named differently.

For instance, while one data source may label data related to "Women's Wear" as an abbreviation like "WW," another might use the same abbreviation "WW" referencing a different data source, without elaboration.

Step 3: Standardize your data

In order to synchronize data across platforms effectively, all sources must communicate using the same language. This means ensuring alignment of column headers and consistency in field information.

Common errors in field data include:

- **Singular and plural** used in different cases (Dress vs. Dresses)
- Variations of how a country is spelled out (US vs. United States vs. United States of America)
- Variations of how a state is listed (NC vs. North Carolina)
- Variations in how location data is collected (City, State vs. zip code)
- Duplicates based on spelling errors (HubSpot vs. Hubspot)

Step 4: Break the data into its smallest components

When different data are grouped together in one field, it's hard to target specific information. For example, if you mix city, state, and country in one field, it's tricky to target by city alone. Keeping each type of data separate makes targeting easier.

Using just one field limits how personalized your emails can be, which can affect sales. In retail, this is a common issue. For instance, if you put "Women's Summer Dresses" in one field, it's tough to personalize emails featuring all summer items or just dresses.

Step 5: Map the data

When you're comparing data from different sources, you might find that similar data is labeled differently. For instance, one platform may use two fields for something while another uses just one. To sort out these differences and align the data, export it from the platforms and start by checking your column headers. What matches? What's different?

Basic types of dynamic content

- Geolocation targeting based on CRM data, such as brick-and-mortar stores closest to the zip code in the recipient's account profile or current location
- Weather content updates based on the weather in the subscribers' location at the time of email open
- Interactive polling that allows recipients to see what is popular, and vote on what they like encourages continued engagement as recipients come back to see the results
- Device targeting that shows content relevant to the device used to view the email
- Popular or new item updates based on best-selling products or new releases that are likely to appeal to a broad audience

Examples of content you can automate in email

- Individualized content or images based on:
  - Preference center data
  - Previous interactions
  - Account information
  - Loyalty program status

- Automated merchandising content such as:
  - New products
  - Related products
  - Sale items

- If/then rules based on CRM or CDP data, such as currency indicators triggered by profile location data

- Social feed counters embedding within an email that pull the most current "like" status from a profile or integrates content from your a social feed (like Instagram)

- Personalized images that add details like a person's name to an image
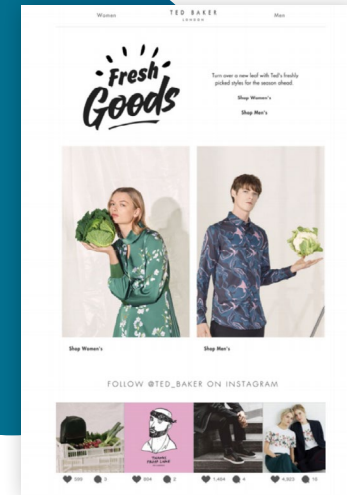
Let Email Guardian keep a constant watch over your valuable triggered transactional emails. Be the first to know when something goes awry—whether it's a broken link or slow-loading image—and rest assured that the email you built is the email they see. **Learn more** ➤

Litmus

Email personalization for all

Whether you're new to email personalization or a pro, you can tap into email marketers' most effective trends with Litmus.

You're invited
Phillip

07	21	59
HOURS	MINUTES	SECONDS

Every Litmus plan includes the tools you need to deliver the right message at the right moment—while making sure it's error-free and ready to drive results—empowering you to make every send count.

Get started today

Part 3: Making the most of your data with product feeds

As you begin to layer in personalization to your emails, keep a strategic mindset. Overall, you want to strike a delicate balance of combining your audiences' preferences with the action you want them to take.

If you're in eCommerce or retail, consider:

- **Tapping straight into your data feed** for current inventory and pricing allows for more granular personalization. By relying on Google Shopping Feeds to dynamically display products, you can reduce the chances of a bad brand experience.

- **Connecting to a live data feed** also shortens the buyer's journey. Relying on a feed improves efficiency, shows product information in real time, and allows you to tap into CRM data to achieve advanced segmentation and personalization with your dynamic content (and saveshours in email production!).

    Subscribers will see highlighted or suggested products based on when they open the email, allowing you to maximize your revenue opportunity and minimize customer experience friction.

Customized communication feels thoughtful—and these tactics offer a perfectly tailored experience based on shopping needs and preferences. This can help improve your segmentation capabilities and boost efficiency with products that turn prospects into buyers faster—and keeps them coming back for more.

Part 4: A memorable subscriber experience starts with the details

Details matter. As competition for subscribers' attention in the inbox increases, delivering personalized content can go a long way. Adding something as simple as the subscriber's name on an image can leave an impression long after they close the email.

Consider inserting products in real time based on factors like "most viewed" or "most purchased." You may also include individual recommendations based on current inventory data, price points, recent browsing history, or combining CRM data with your product feed. These approaches can make the experience personally relevant to subscribers while also increasing revenue potential.

Ted Baker created an email campaign that displayed their most viewed and purchased products from the previous seven days. Products dynamically updated based on when the subscriber opened the email to provide the most current inventory and pricing available. CRM data was also used to show recommended products based on the subscriber's preferred categories.
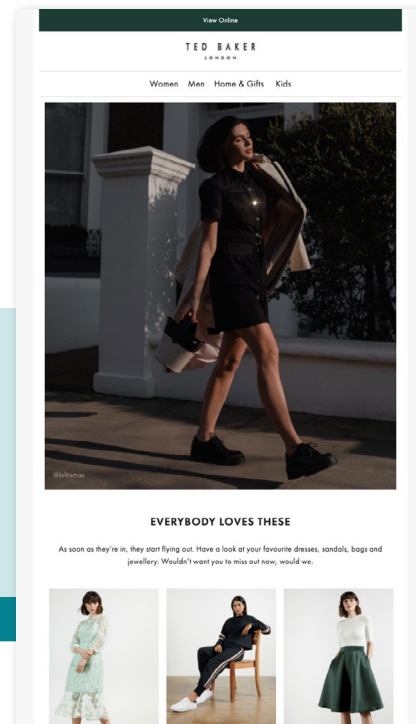
Examples of dynamic content
featuring examples powered by Litmus Personalize

Data and time-based personalization

Boux Avenue used time/date rules to create emails that matched the current zodiac sign at the time of open. The entire campaign was automated, which allowed for fun and engaging content with room for easy adjustments.

Kate Spade put personalization front and center by prominently displaying each subscriber's name in the header image upon email opening. While simple in design, this customization stands out and is an effective way to make each subscriber feel valued.


CUSTOMERS LOVE PERSONALIZATION.
83% are willing to share data for personalized experiences. 80% are more likely to purchase from brands that offer personalized experiences.

The right message, rain or shine

Winter Park knows the weather and the latest snow accumulation are important to their audience. They created a fully automated email with the snow report alongside live information about ski lift times. For those already en route, this helps garner excitement as they head out to the slopes. For those who haven't committed to making the trek, this email could be just the nudge they need to get to the mountain to enjoy some fresh powder.
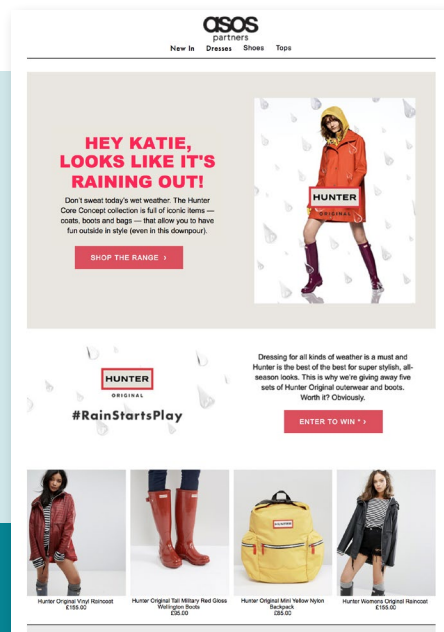
ASOS combined name personalization with weather-targeted images to perfectly appeal to rainy day shoppers. Recipients received specific, relevant images and messaging based on the weather in their location at the time the email was opened. Taking the extra step to acknowledge the conditions and offer a fun solution helped turn a dreary day into sales.
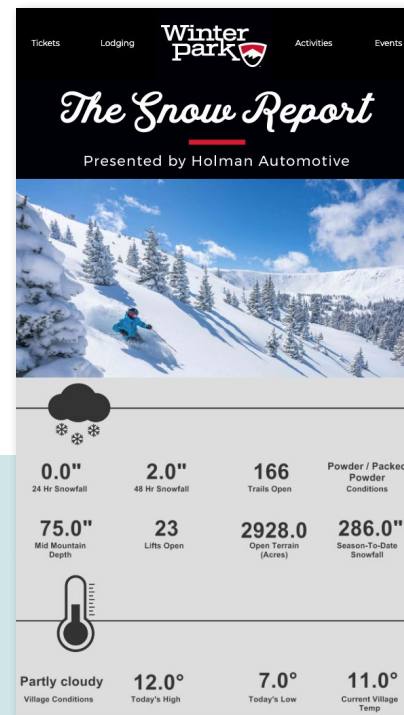
Location, location, location

Using email to promote nearby brick-and-mortar locations can help drive foot traffic as well as encourage those shoppers who prefer seeing products in person before buying online.

Including location suggestions, along with specific details such as store hours, can be a powerful addition to your email campaign strategy.

Kate Spade encouraged subscribers to come shopping with them by adding a nearest store locator to their email. Based on the location when opened, the email triggered a map with the closest stores. And if there wasn't one nearby, they created a default message that led to the store location lists to help subscribers plan their next shopping trip.
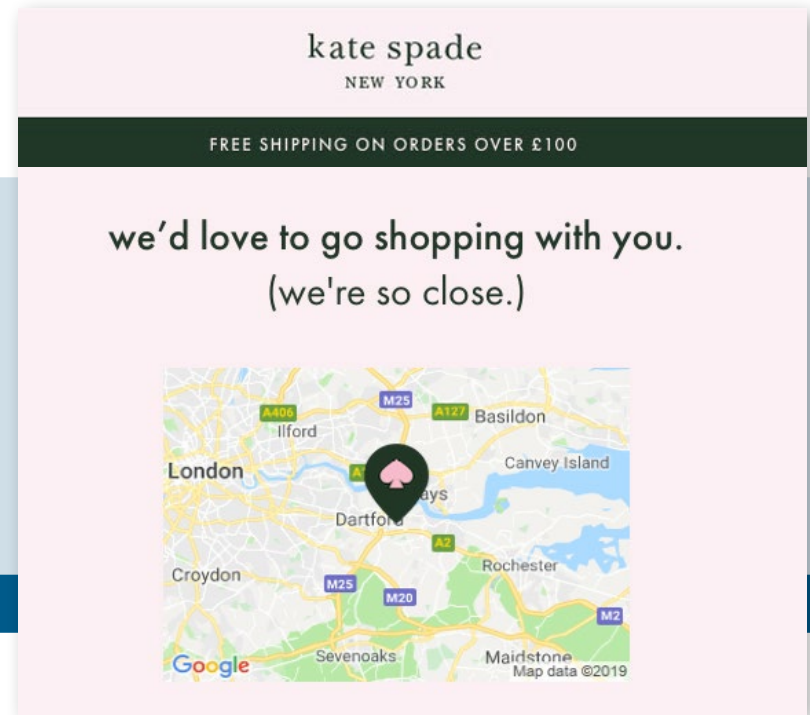
Countdown timers

Creating a sense of urgency can be a great persuasive tool to get customers to take immediate action. Whether you're counting down the hours of a big sale or creating excitement for an event, countdown timers are a powerful visual tool to build anticipation.

The Ikon Pass prominently displayed a countdown timer in their email header to show subscribers the clock was ticking on low pass prices. They also took the opportunity to emphasize additional savings and perks of being a passholder. By fostering this sense of exclusivity, it encouraged action and created fear of missing out.

Bulk used countdown timers in two very different ways, in one email. In the header, they displayed time left to purchase the deal of the day, creating urgency to shop. They also displayed upcoming promotions and timelines in the email. When each became available, the email automatically unlocked and became shoppable. Adding automation based on time of open allowed emails to be relevant past the launch date.
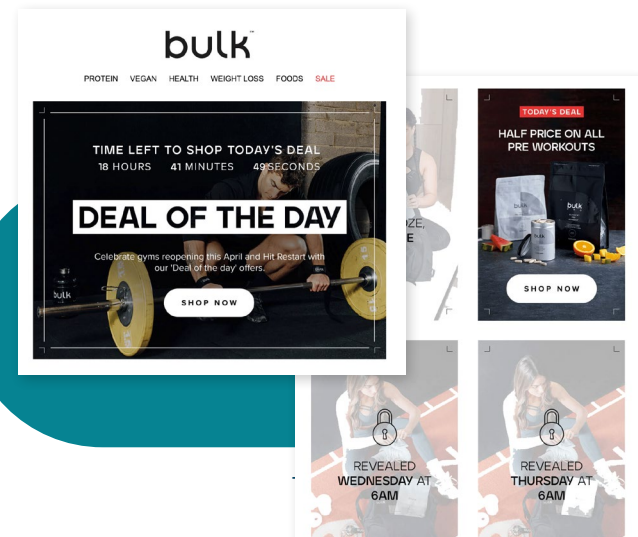
Social proof

Show, don't tell, with social proof in email—a powerful way to build trust and boost engagement.

Subscribers love Interest Signals—[proven by consistently higher click-through and conversion](#) rates. Using a social media feed in emails is an easy way to show recipients what people are loving, and more of your brand. By automating the process, you can show social engagement in real time.

25% increase in total opens

180% more orders vs. control

26% increase in revenue

190%+ more revenue vs. control

Mamas and Papas layered multiple levels of personalization in their campaign for the upcoming arrival of a new baby. In addition to personalizing the name, they also created content relevant to the stage of pregnancy that week. Then, they included images from their Instagram feed to show other great ways to stay connected with contests and product updates. By encouraging subscribers to follow them online, they were building an audience they could continue to engage across platforms.
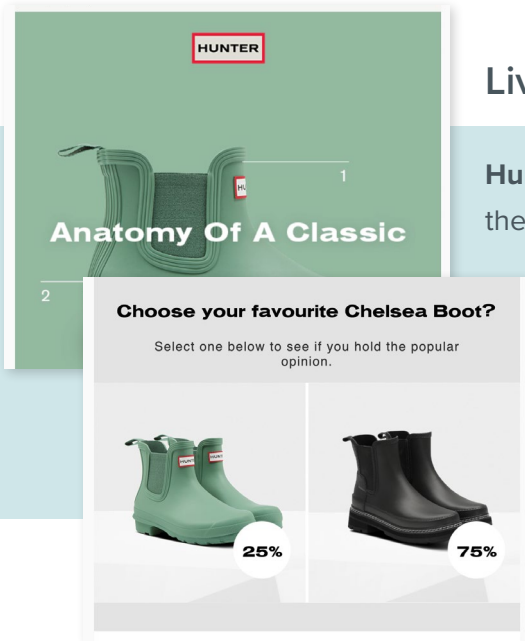
Live polls

Hunter created an interactive experience with their campaign promoting an update to their classic rain boots. By including a simple poll asking subscribers to pick their favorite boot, they were able to increase engagement while creating more interest around the product.


Bulk Powders took advantage of the excitement for the upcoming London Marathon. Knowing their audience consisted of fitness enthusiasts, they created a campaign to gauge who was participating. While the poll was fun for subscribers to see how many people would be at the event, it also served as a way for Bulk Powders to learn more about their audience. Knowing which subscribers were runners allowed them to better personalize future campaigns.
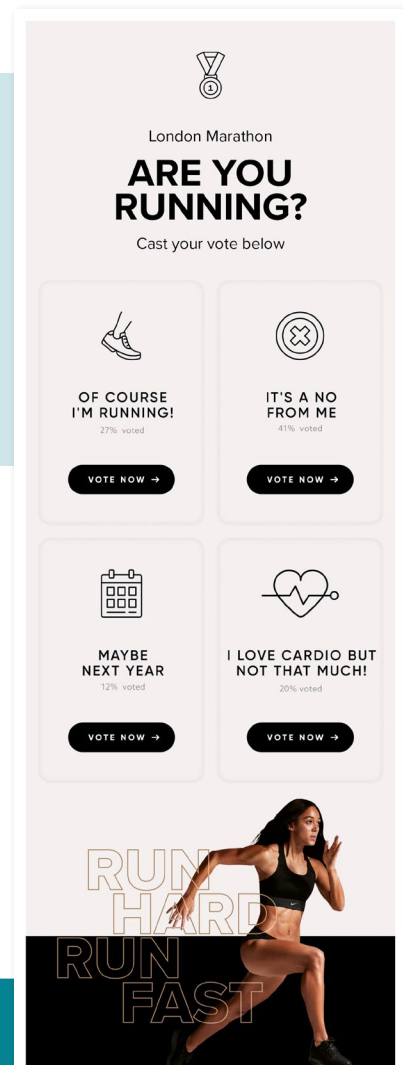
Emails with perfect timing

Changing email content based on the time the subscriber opens skyrockets engagement. Open and click-through rates surge as customers re-open to see the latest content, offers, or deals. Timed offers or daily deals are strong strategies to keep customers opening, and allows brands to show more relevant content.

Co-op delivered their latest recipes from their website straight to the inbox, but with an added twist. Instead of showing the same choices at every open, the recipes updated to reflect the relevant time of the day. So, email recipients saw recipes for breakfast in the morning, lunch in the afternoon, or dinner options in the evening.
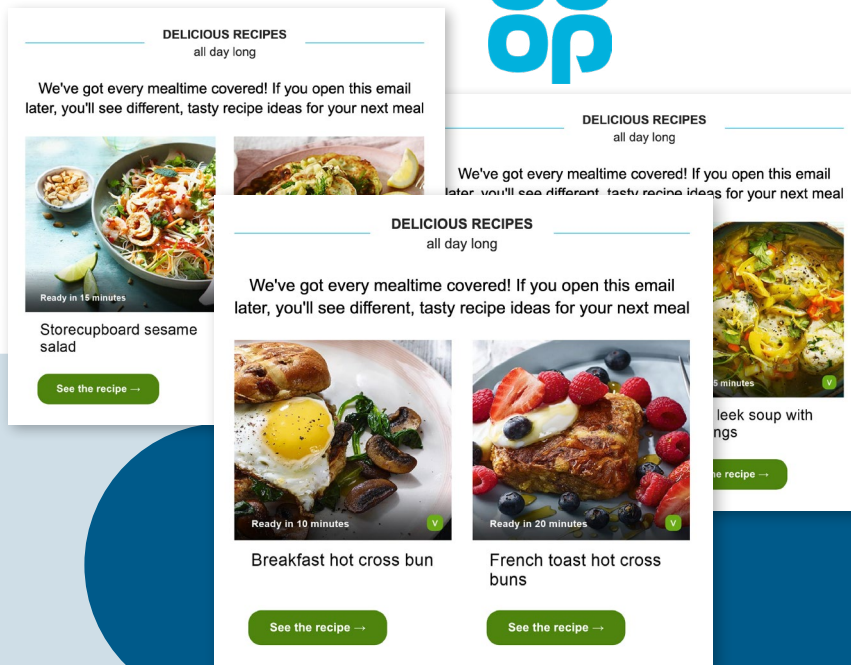
Reclaim browse or cart abandoners

Shoppers who have browsed without taking action or filled their virtual carts and failed to make a purchase can be a huge opportunity for businesses to recover revenue. Taking the extra step to send an email makes shoppers feel valued; re-engaging may be just the motivation that they need.
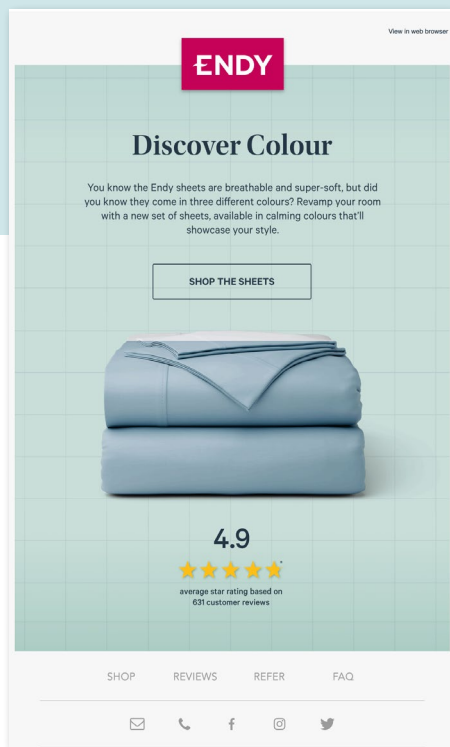

New Look used email to entice their subscribers to purchase items viewed or left in their virtual cart. By customizing emails based on site behavior, they were able to focus on audiences more likely to convert.

Endy displayed customer rating in an email, which immediately cements their reliability and builds trust. By simply connecting with partners' feeds, they were able to add the power of customer reviews.
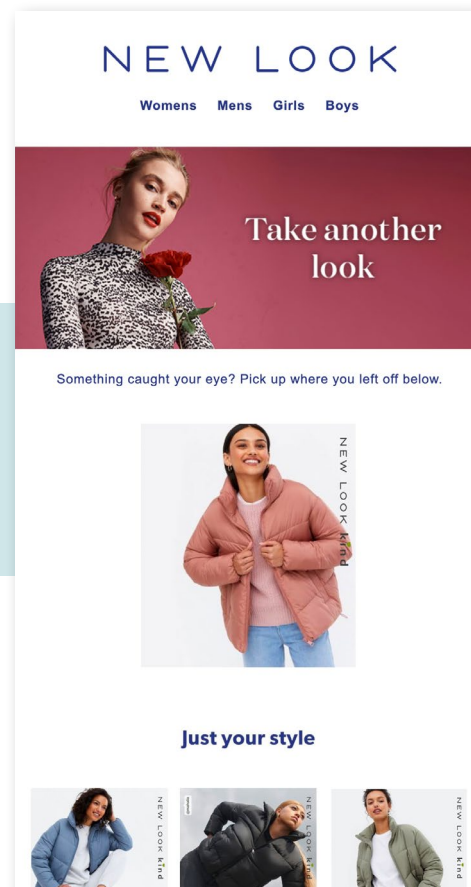
Free email templates made for you. Get browser and cart abandoners back on the bandwagon with one of our free email templates—tested and approved by our very own email artisans. **Browse our collection ➜**
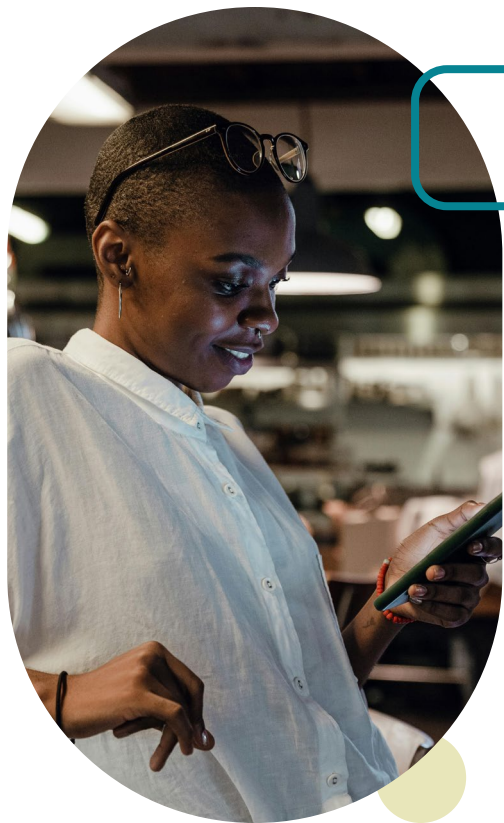
The power of personalization

The power of personalization for both brands and their subscribers is undeniable. When done right, it makes customers feel valued and builds a connection that creates trust and brand loyalty.

Personalization through email allows marketers to reach subscribers at all stages of the purchase journey, converting browsers to buyers and improving customer retention. For customers, the reassurance that brands are collecting data for their benefit, while securely storing their personal information, allows for better engagement and improves the overall experience. Bringing the hyper-relevant experience we've all come to appreciate (and even expect) in every email requires participation on behalf of each subscriber. Once that bond is created, the possibilities are endless.

Ready to engage your subscribers with powerful 1:1 experiences?

Personalization shouldn't be difficult. With the right technology in place, email personalization is achievable at scale and in every email you send. No matter what your business is, there's an opportunity to use automated email personalization—and benefit from it!

Automate and scale the creation of personalized email experiences with Litmus Personalize.

Start your free trial

A little about us

Hi! We're Litmus and we offer a complete solution for email optimization and personalization that helps email marketers like you create, personalize, test, protect, review, and analyze every email to create exceptional brand experiences for every subscriber. To learn more about us, please check out litmus.com or connect with us on LinkedIn, Instagram, X, or Facebook. From solutions for effective email personalization to an airtight QA process monitored by cutting-edge emerging email technology and more, Litmus is here to help your email team make every send count™.

Want to stay in touch?

Get how-tos, inspiration, and more from our newsletters—for email pros, by email pros.

Subscribe today