

knak.

The definitive guide to creating kick-ass emails



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The case for kick-ass emails

An overflowing inbox feels like an unfortunate staple of the 21st century.

Between marketing, business, and personal messages, if you're online, you're drowning in email. And that's not changing anytime soon — in 2021, [71% of marketers](#) sent more email than they did the year before. Yep, that's right.

So, why are marketers still investing in such a competitive channel? Because it works.

Email is one of the most effective marketing strategies, delivering a jaw-dropping [3,600% average](#) ROI. That's miles (and miles and miles) ahead of any other channel.

There's no doubt that email marketing offers serious potential — that's if marketers can create kick-ass emails that stand out from the crowd. To us, kick-ass emails are irresistible to open and effortless to read, pulling the reader in and creating an exciting, delightful experience that encourages a specific action.

For many, email marketing is a time-consuming, labour-intensive process. Traditionally, emails need to be hand-coded or built from templates that offer basic customization, but still require hard technical skills. Experimentation and creativity isn't possible with this kind of process, and brands living in this space are going to be left behind.

Today, leading email creation platforms use modular, no-code technology to give creative control back to in-house marketing teams and let them create gorgeous, compelling, and customised emails at scale.

In this guide, we'll explain how to optimise every part of your marketing emails to get results, from subject line to footer. Keep reading, and get set to create truly kick-ass emails in 2022.

Kick-ass first impressions

Be creative, mysterious, and intriguing.

Hint at your offer, but leave the reader wanting more.



Kick-ass **first impressions**

Kick-ass emails start before the reader even opens your message.

Right in their inbox, as they're scrolling through their messages, your readers see your subject line, preview text, and sender name. That context is ultimately what determines whether or not they open your email.

It's why these fields are arguably the most important if you want great results from your email marketing. You need to do everything in your power to catch your reader's interest and entice them to click on that message.

Here are two ways to do this:

1. Be crystal clear about what you're offering, like a new product or piece of content. What will the reader get if they open your email?



For example, you could say "Our benchmark report is here!"

2. Be creative, mysterious, and intriguing. Hint at your offer, but leave the reader wanting more.



For instance: "Do this one thing to boost your open rates."

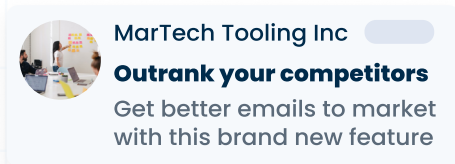
You can even do a bit of both for greater effect. A/B test different styles of subject lines and see which resonates better with your target audience. Or, choose a subject line that's super clear and a preview text that's more intriguing, or vice versa.

Top tips

Subject lines, previews, and sender names

1

Make your subject line actionable

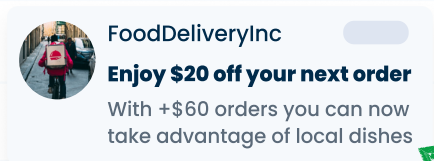


2

Use your preview text to add more context to your subject line

3

Use clear and simple language that doesn't put your reader off



4

Avoid using words like "free" that might put your email straight in the spam folder

5

Showcase the value of your email up front

6

Keep the preview text under 100 characters

7

Make the sender name clear, memorable, and relatable

Don't be afraid to use a person's name — we've seen our emails perform better when they come from a real person



To:
From: **Ishaan Ahuja**
Subject: **Chase, Thank you for being a loyal customer** ★

8

Consider using fun, on-brand emojis — but don't overdo it

9

Personalise subject lines with segmented or micro segmented audiences



Marketers know that A/B testing is an important part of finding the right subject lines and preview text. But when you're hand-coding all your emails or working from inflexible templates, you may not have the time to do it properly. Teams that use Knak are leveraging the platform's modular, drag-and-drop email builder to give themselves the time to focus on testing and other things that make a big impact.

Mini case study #1

Conductor

Just ask Knak user [Conductor](#), a business intelligence platform for marketers. When they started using Knak, their time to create an email went from days to just a few minutes. That let them flex their creativity and experiment, and they saw dramatically improved results from their very first message.

Kick-ass email copy

The average attention span is less than 10 seconds.

Kick-ass email copy



Congratulations! You've wooed customers into opening your message. But that's half the battle.

Readers are busy, and the **average attention span is less than 10 seconds.**

To get your point across, you need to make your message clear, concise, and easily skimmable. If there's any friction or confusion as customers read your message, and if your email doesn't align with what you promised in your subject line, they'll simply close it and go on with their day.

People don't carefully read marketing emails — they quickly scan them to pick up key messages. To make sure they can't miss what you're trying to say, **highlight key messages in titles, subheadings, and small blocks of text**, and make the action you want the reader to take super clear.

When considering copy, you also need to think about custom fonts if you are using them. Make sure any custom, branded fonts display properly on all devices and ensure you have alternative fonts in place that will load and provide a good experience for people who don't have clients or devices that support the custom fonts.

Top tips

Email copy

1

Use 14px+ font for body text and 22px+ font for titles

3

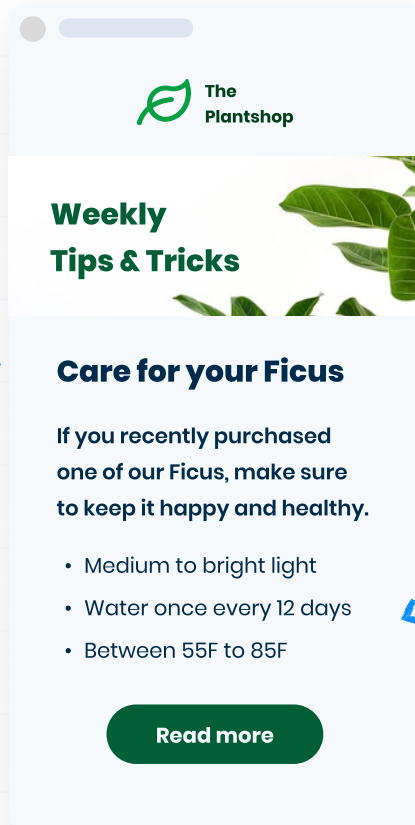
Left-align paragraphs over three lines

2

Keep paragraphs under five lines

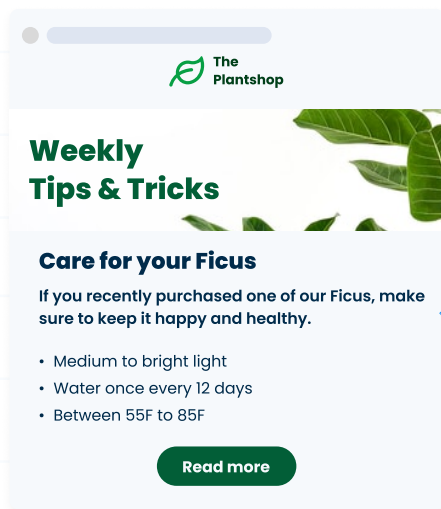
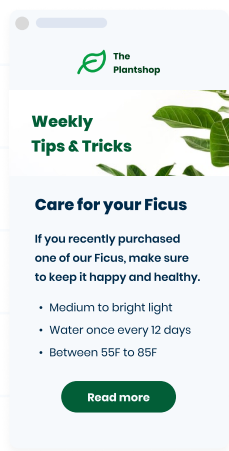
4

Try bulleted lists for easy skimming



6

Use powerful language that encourages action



7

Use 1.5–2 lining spacing

8

Use active language

9

Make sure any custom, branded fonts display properly on all device.



To come up with the perfect body text, you'll probably want your email reviewed by at least a couple of other people on your marketing team.

Knak makes that easy, because your team can edit, review, collaborate, and approve, right within our platform.

Kick-ass design and layout

Use background colours, headers, images or videos,
and graphics or GIFs to break your email up into easily
digestible chunks of information.



Kick-ass **design and layout**

Getting the copy right is one thing, but readers expect your messages to be delivered on a beautiful, shiny silver platter. Your design goal is to enhance the clarity and impact of your email, creating a smooth, effortless reading experience.

Even if your brand identity is bold or colourful, readability comes first. Busy, cluttered emails get closed and deleted, so give your text, headers, and images plenty of white space and room to breathe.

Use background colours, headers, images or videos, and graphics or GIFs to **break your email up into easily digestible chunks of information.**

A well-designed email should have a sense of flow, naturally prompting your reader to scroll right through to the end.

Use images and GIFs — emails that include them have been shown to perform better. But these fun visual elements should be used to enhance your message, not serve as your main mode of communication.

Custom fonts are not just a consideration for ensuring your copy is engaging and legible, but they also improve of design and layout of your email. However, always have a back-up plan to ensure they render properly. Include alternative fonts for those clients and devices that don't support custom fonts.

What about video?

Email is moving away from static content. The use of animated gifs, videos and dynamic images among other types of content is on the rise.

Not all email clients render this content correctly. Embedding a full video within an email is not practical as the email file size would be too large and you would run into deliverability issues. However, there are creative ways to feature it in your communications.

For example, for video, hosting the video on another platform and placing a screenshot of a frame of the video in your email with a play icon overlaid on top can be a great way to feature video content.

Finally, **always close out your email with a footer section.** Your footer could include links to unsubscribe, visit your brand's website or social accounts, or forward the message to a friend. Readers expect a footer, and it's a great way to bookend your email with a standard branded element.

Top tips

Design and layout

1

Use a vertical layout between 500px and 650px wide

2

Include up to five modular sections

3

Use plenty of white space around headers, subheaders, images, and text

4

Keep things high contrast

5

Enable hover state and use colourful, high-contrast, underlined font for links

6

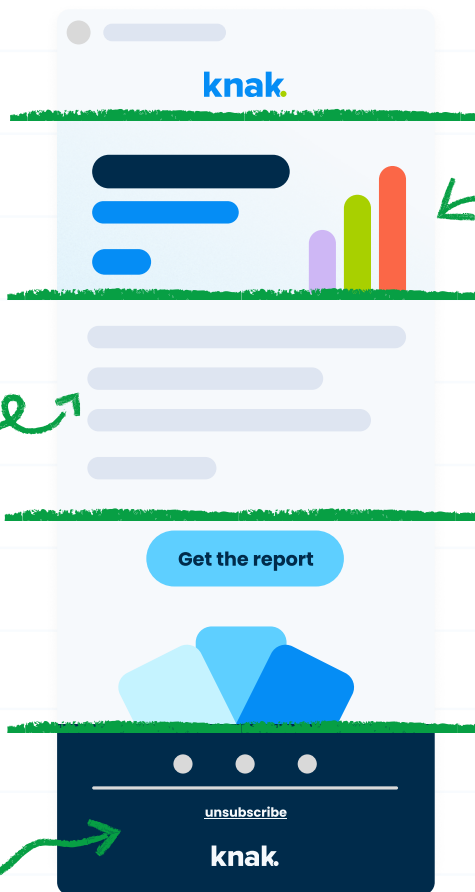
Optimise your image size for faster load times on mobile.

7

Don't forget a footer with links to unsubscribe or visit your brand online

8

Experiment and see what kinds of content performs best with your audience





Knak's Inspiration Center was built to help marketers with the very first step of the email creation process: inspiration. Users can review hundreds of great emails to get inspired, clone it into their brand, and build their next stunning email.

Within Knak, it's easy to tweak the spacing, padding, headers, and colours, until your email is beautiful to look at and easy to read. Because you don't need coding skills or hard technical knowledge to use Knak, designers and marketers have more creative control.

Mini case study #2

WordPress VIP

“ For WordPress VIP, stepping away from a stagnant template and building a library of on-brand modules did wonders for their email efforts. Not only did it vastly improve their team's flexibility, it also increased their click-through rate by 120%!



Kick-ass call to action “CTA”

Your subject line determines whether your message gets opened. But it's your call to action, or CTA, that gets you the results you want.

Kick-ass **call to action “CTA”**

Your subject line determines whether your message gets opened. But it's your call to action, or CTA, that gets you the results you want.

Every single marketing email aims to inspire action. That could be a direct conversion, like booking a product demo — but it could also be something more top-of-funnel and awareness-oriented, like “read our latest blog.” For best results, **choose a single CTA and focus your entire email around it.**

Include your CTA above the fold — that's **right at the top of your email** — before the viewer needs to scroll down. They should know from the start what you want them to do. Then, you can repeat that CTA two more times using buttons, links, or prompts. You should also **close out your email by repeating that CTA** link or button again.

If your email and CTA are part of a dedicated campaign, you should also make sure it drives to a branded, optimised landing page.

Top tips

Call to action

1

Use compelling, active verbs that communicate the value to the reader

3

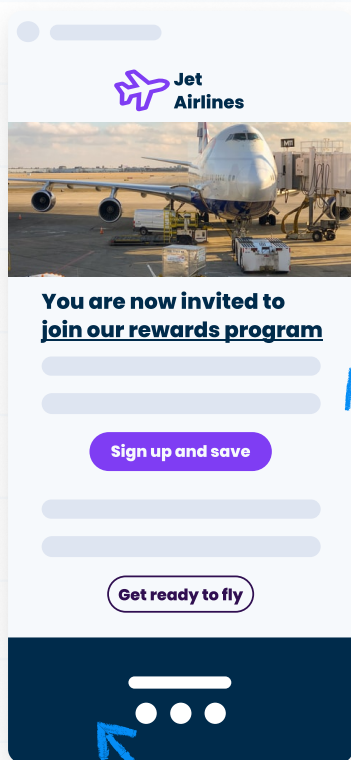
Avoid boring and uninspired words like “download” or “read”

2

Use urgent, timely language

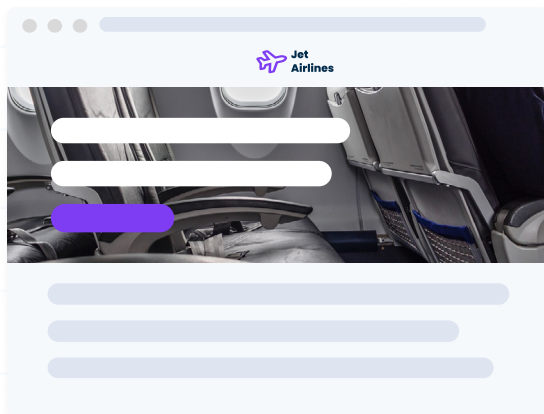
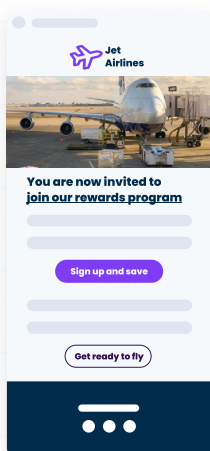
4

Make sure any other links, such as in your footer, are much less prominent than your CTA



5

Design a large CTA button with attention grabbing colours



6

Have your CTA lead to an effective landing page



Knak software has an "Optimise" function that provides the ability to automatically scan your emails for common mistakes that may affect email deliverability and performance

As a drag-and-drop email editor, Knak makes it easier than ever to add CTA buttons to your email. You don't need any code, and you can modify them to your heart's content.

Plus, with our 'Highlight on Hover' setting, you can set your CTA buttons to increase in brightness when the viewer hovers over them.

Kick-ass responsive elements

Over 50% of email campaigns are read on a mobile device, and mobile responsive emails are 65% more likely to bring customers to your website.

Kick-ass **responsive elements**

Did you know over [50% of email campaigns are read on a mobile device](#), and responsive emails are [65% more likely to bring customers to your website](#)?

If your email design doesn't cater to every possible reading experience, you're throwing a large portion of your audience away — and [40% of your clicks](#).

Responsive design means your email is built to display correctly on any screen. It's just another part of the smooth, easy reading experience a kick-ass marketing email should create.

The classic example is dark mode. Many users have dark mode enabled on their devices, as it saves power and reduces eye strain. **In dark mode, the colours of some or all of your email will invert**, from just the box around your message, to all of its actual text and logos.

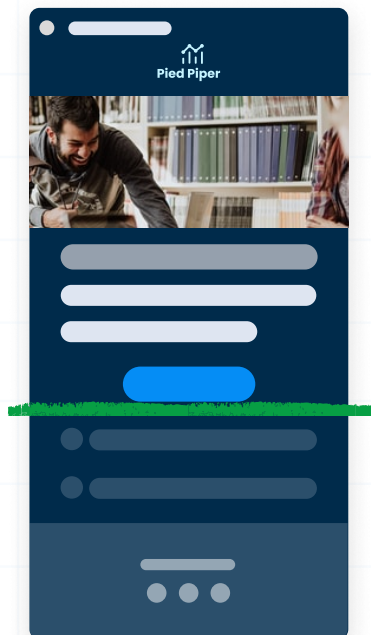
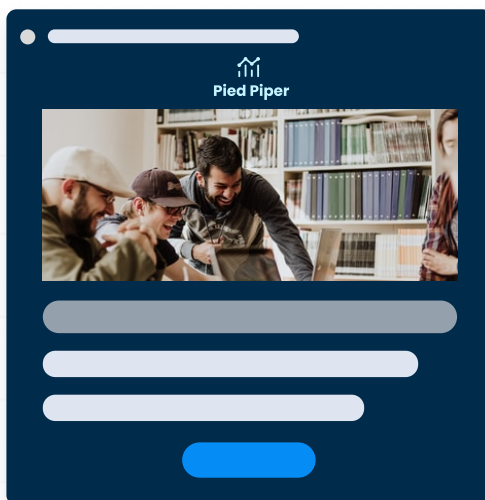
Responsive design can get pretty finicky, but email builders like Knak make it simple. Today, there's no reason your emails shouldn't display perfectly across all the devices and email clients your customers use.

Top tips

Responsive email

1

Optimise your images by choosing different ones for desktop vs. mobile



2

Design for mobile first — this means keeping your text short, thinking about your layout, and keeping your CTA above the fold

3

Keep things high contrast so they look good in dark mode

4

Use a contrasting stroke or outline on black or white logos, to make sure they're still visible with inverted colours



5

Use transparent .pngs for your logos. If you use .jpgs, make sure they are all the same size to avoid irregular backgrounds around your images



If the thought of making an email that automatically adapts to devices and browsers gives you a headache, you aren't alone. Choose an email builder like Knak that automatically optimises your emails for whatever reading experience your customers prefer.

Plus, Knak's mobile features make it easy for you to adjust and customize for mobile with no coding required.

Mini case study #3

Southern New Hampshire University

“ [Southern New Hampshire University \(SNHU\)](#) uses Knak to easily create emails that look great to their entire mailing list. Because they needed to email an enormous community of 1.2 million students, SNHU needed to consider many different devices and email clients.

With Knak’s built in quality control and responsive design features, everyone involved in email creation could see what the final product would look like, no matter what email platform or device it was viewed on.

The result? **SNHU’s emails became 5x faster to create, and prospective students’ satisfaction with SNHU’s emails rose 11.7%.** ”

Kick-ass accessible features

Accessibility is part of inclusive,
responsible email marketing.



Kick-ass accessible features

Did you know that [15% of the world's population](#) lives with some kind of disability? Accessible email design ensures that all of your readers can keep up with your brand via email, including those with visual, motor, auditory, or cognitive disabilities.

Accessibility is part of inclusive, responsible email marketing. But it's not just about ethics and doing the right thing — it's good business sense, too! Why would you risk alienating a large portion of your audience, or even exposing your brand to potential liability?

To make your content accessible, it needs to be compatible with assistive technology that helps people living with disabilities access their email. The primary example is screen readers, which translate on-screen text into audio format for people who are visually impaired.

Luckily, there are well-established rules to follow to make your content accessible.

Top tips

Accessible email

1

Always include alt text, which describes images to readers who can't see them. Images are half the fun, and alt text means everyone can enjoy them!

Alternative text: Lecture teaching classroom



2

Contrast is important for readability.

Whether your viewer is visually impaired or not, you don't want them struggling to read your email

3

Give your CTAs a bit more context so that readers know where they're going

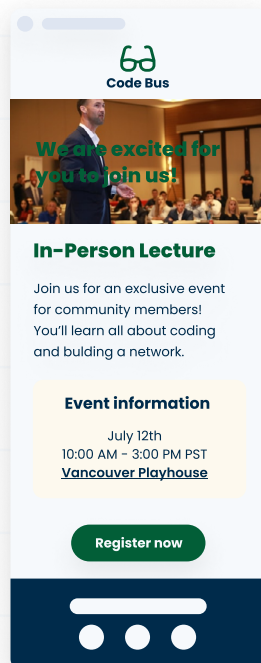
4

Never embed text into images



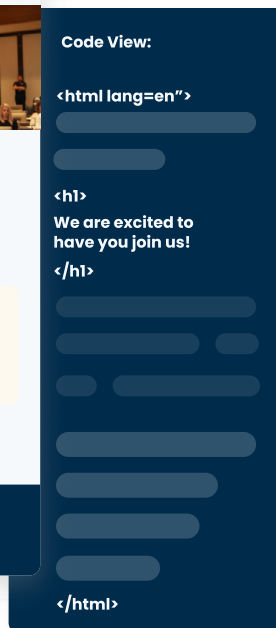
6

Emojis cannot be read by screen readers. Use emojis to enhance your message, not replace words



5

Set your email's language as an HTML attribute, so that screen readers can pronounce words correctly



7

Always include HTML role tags, such as 'header' or 'footer,' to different fields of your email. Otherwise, the screen reader may interpret it as a data table, and read it out incorrectly



Accessibility is a big deal, but Knak makes it a little easier. You can set accessibility best practices, like language tagging, as rules that apply to all your modules.

The platform will also enable ALT tags and add roles to table elements automatically.



Kick-ass dynamic content

Dynamic content is part of the
next generation of email marketing.

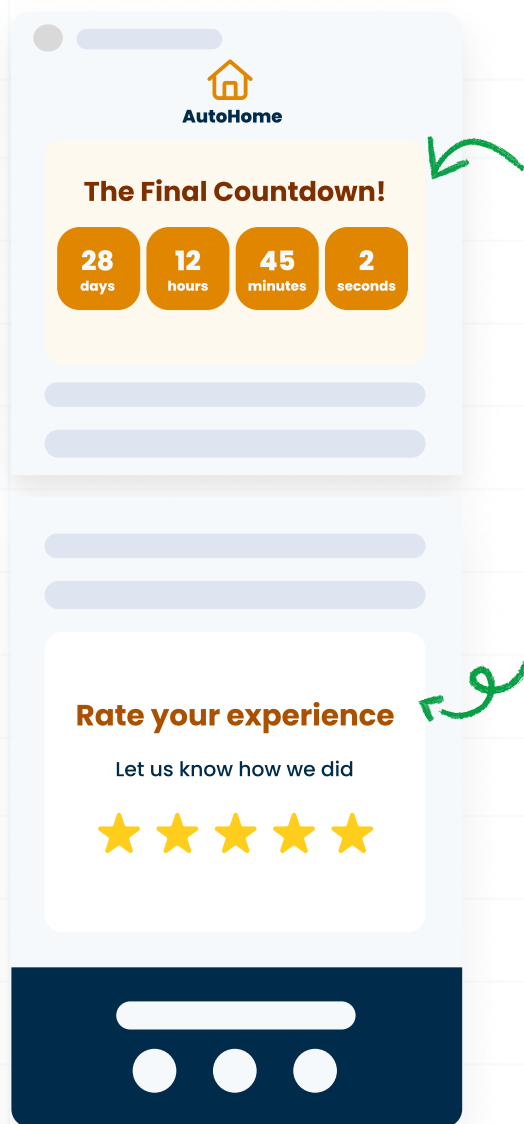
Kick-ass **dynamic content**

Because email can deliver such great results, smart marketers are investing heavily in email — but they know that their peers and competitors are, too. That means they need every advantage in the book to stand out, get opened, and get the ROI they want.

Unique, dynamic content is one way to engage viewers and bring something fresh to their inbox. From personalisation to animated elements, **dynamic content is part of the next generation of email marketing.**

Top tips

Dynamic content



1

Bring the energy with dynamic elements

For example, you could build in a countdown clock leading up to your annual conference, or a fun animation to help illustrate a new product feature

2

Make it interactive

Let your viewer interact with your brand right from their inbox. You could embed a form to collect product reviews, or include a fun mini-game (complete with prizes) to celebrate the launch of a product

3

Go deep on personalisation.

Try creating separate audiences for different locations, and only sharing content that the person hasn't yet read on your site



With Knak, you don't need technical skills for techniques like this. Because our module-style builder makes it so fast and easy to create emails, you'll have time to personalise them to different groups of customers.

Mini case study #4

Guild Education



This strategy worked well for all [Guild Education](#), a Knak customer who delivers professional development programs to Fortune 100 employees. Customization is an important part of Guild's marketing, because every employer they work with has unique educational offerings.

By integrating Knak with their marketing automation platform, they were able to easily create custom, personalised messages at scale.

That resulted in a 92% higher click-to-open rate!



Closing thoughts



Ready to smash your email goals?

Kick-ass email marketing might seem challenging on the surface, but it doesn't need to be a headache.

Behind all the tips, tricks, and best practices, the basic principle is to make your reader's life easier, offering them value and sharing your messages in the clearest way possible.

With a modern, no-code email builder like Knak, creating beautiful emails that get results is easy, efficient, and maybe even fun.

Want to know more about how it all works? [Get in touch](#) and we'll show you.

