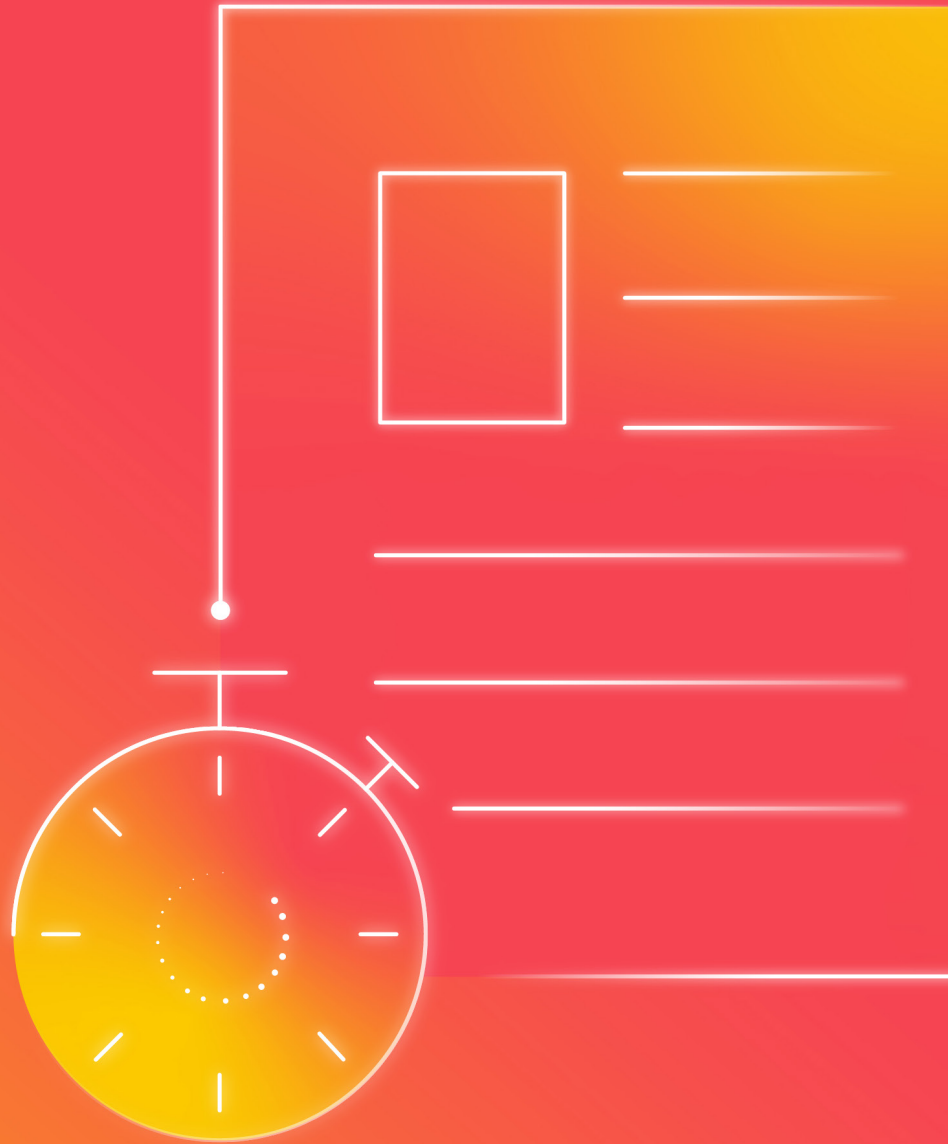


# Email in Practice: Animation and Real-Time Content

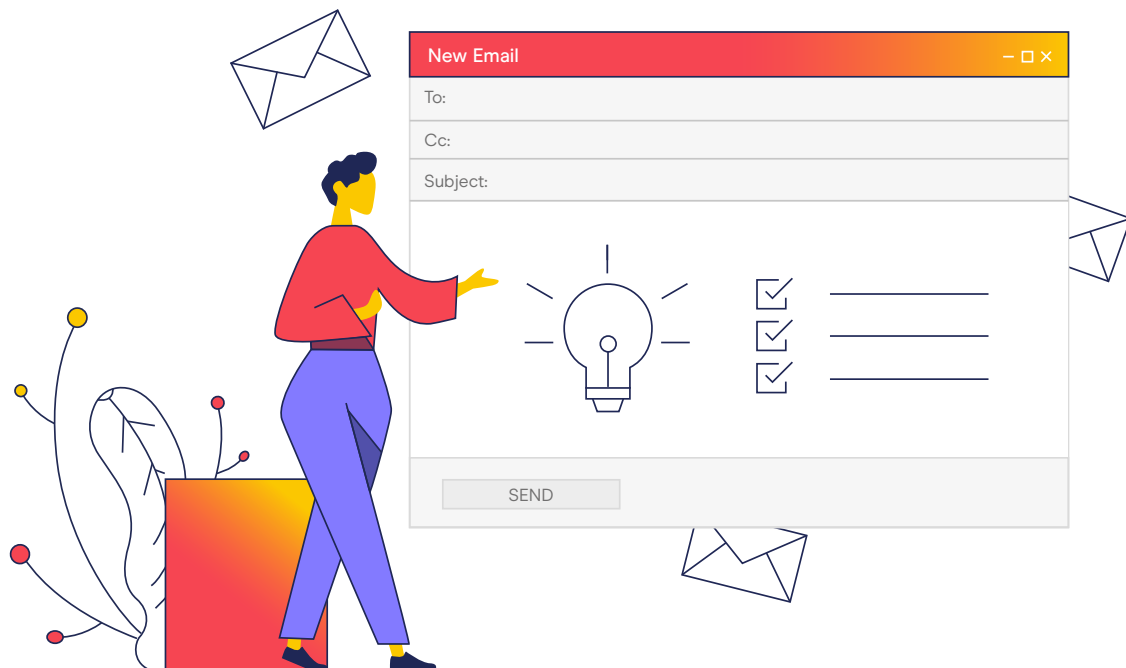


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# / Introduction

Ever since Eve complained to God that she didn't receive the email about that tree being off limits, even though she had subscribed to forbidden fruit monthly, we have had a set of rules governing creativity that you "must obey" if you want to reach the utopia that is universal inbox placement.



But let's just think about those 'Best Practice' rules for a minute.

Not too many images

Nothing moving

No backgrounds

We have devices more powerful than our laptops in our pockets. There's Wi-Fi everywhere and almost 100 email clients to choose from. So, why are we worried about slicing a 100k image into 4 parts so it downloads in Outlook, when I can talk to someone from across the globe using my watch. It's time to evolve the guidance and reach beyond 'Best Practice' or at least form a creative point of view anyway.

We, as email marketers worry because we want as many emails going to the inbox as possible. But think about it from a different standpoint. What if instead - we focused on those who engage with the email. What if you got 100% placement but no engagement, yet if you had made your email super sexy, risking only 50% inbox placement, you could receive a mere 1% engagement.

What would you choose?

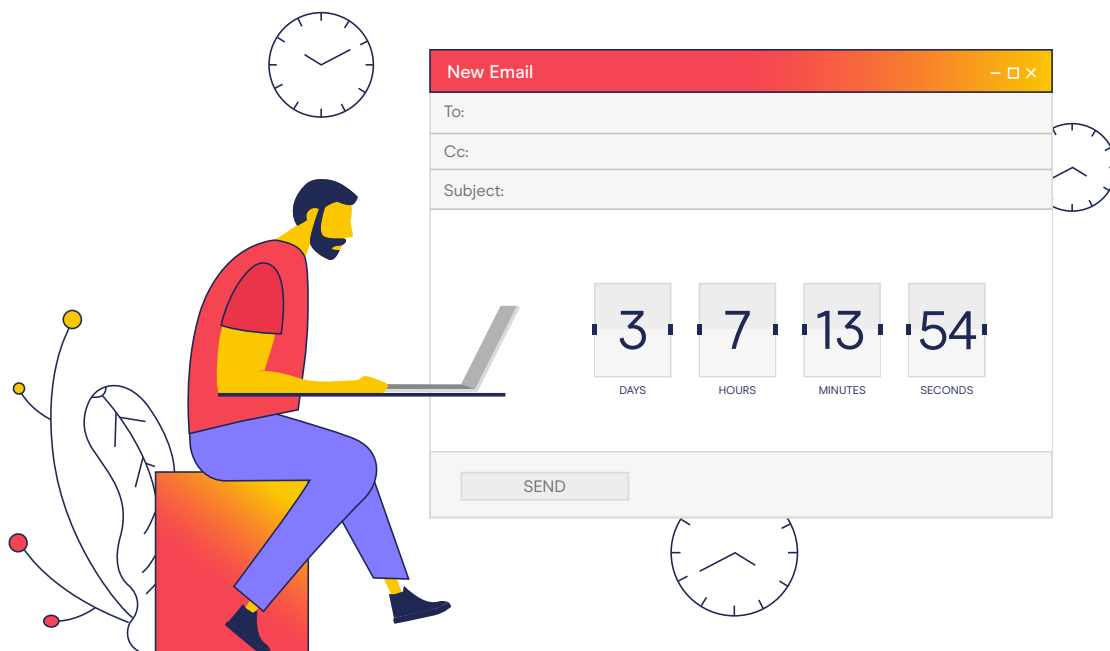
There has always been a balance between placement and engagement, but now it's time, as newer tech becomes more and more compatible, to stop worrying so much about the what-ifs of inbox placement and embrace the new techniques that are tripling ROI's and taking the email world by storm. And in this case, it's all about RTC, or Real-Time Content - a jewel in the crown of the modern email marketing campaign strategy, one that helps breathe new life into what was previously a relatively static medium by delivering up-to-the minute live data and moving imagery that adapts depending on anything, from user behaviour and data-sets through to something as simple as the weather outside.

# / Real-Time Content

In the wide email marketing space, Real-Time Content has become the third dimension to personalisation and relevancy.

Presenting users with an up-to-date status at the moment of opening the email as compared to the moment the email was broadcast, adds a previously missing element of direct immediacy and live experience to email communication that was previously only possible through dynamic content on a website.

A classic example - and one that would have arrived in everybody's inbox at some point in their email-receiving life - is the countdown clock. Counting down to the Black Friday sale, to the end of special offers weeks at Virgin Atlantic, to the online box office opening of Ricky Gervais' new standup shows. Open the email on Wednesday morning and you have 3 days, 7 hours, 13mins and 54 seconds left to buy.... no, wait.... 52 seconds... 51. The visual ticking-away of time and the accuracy in relation to the deadline, whenever the email is opened, maximises the urgency-effect and plays the fear-of-missing-out card with maximum gusto.



This mechanism has been used regularly and is simply relying on a central, server-based countdown animation.

A venue is pushing to sell remaining tickets to their concerts. The static email solution would show a concert listing with “buy tickets” links for each event. The “first come first serve” routine will favour people who open the email early. Customers who get to their inbox later that day, or even the next morning, will experience disappointment after clicking through on some popular events that still featured a “buy tickets” link even after selling out.

RTC allows the call-to-actions to dynamically adjust in real-time and reflect the current availability of tickets at the moment of the email being opened. If concerts have sold out, the listing will reflect this with a relevant message or remove those offers altogether.

Usage examples are getting even more impactful with the addition of animation. Imagine a fundraising appeal that shows the current level of donations at each given moment - every time the email is being opened - with an animated thermometer climbing up to the up-to-date tally.

Integrating a complex content feed allows you to tie personalisation and relevancy further together: A TV entertainment guide that features current shows, curated to the recipient’s viewing preferences and changes depending on the moment at which the email is opened with a “what’s on tonight” or a “watch this tonight” message. Open the email today and it will suggest programme highlights for the same night but feature different shows tomorrow and the day after. Text, images and visibility of content will dynamically update depending on the time the user accesses the email.

A campaign that relies on local weather as a storytelling device can use RTC in combination with a relevant feed that translates the current weather at each recipient’s location at any given time and relate the email messaging, product suggestion or just the look and feel to outdoor conditions.

The key factor to make RTC stand out in your emails is time. While we can all control the exact moment, an email is being sent or triggered, we cannot determine when each customer is going to open it. If a campaign relies on or heavily benefits from demonstrating a current, up-to-date scenario and wants to emphasise the fact that every customer has their own rhythm of accessing their emails, Real-Time Content is a powerful mechanism to connect to audiences.

### Case Study: Moveable Ink

Kirsty Fraser, Head of Marketing at Movable Ink, told me that they consider their platform to be a visual experience platform. “90% of what we process in the brain is visual and that we process imagery in 13 milliseconds, which is 60,000 times faster than it takes to process text. 80% of people remember what they see, compared with only 20% of what they read, and we are able to drive a tailored visual experience that is unique at the very moment a reader opens an email.”



**90%**

**of what the  
brain process**



**80%**

**visual memory**



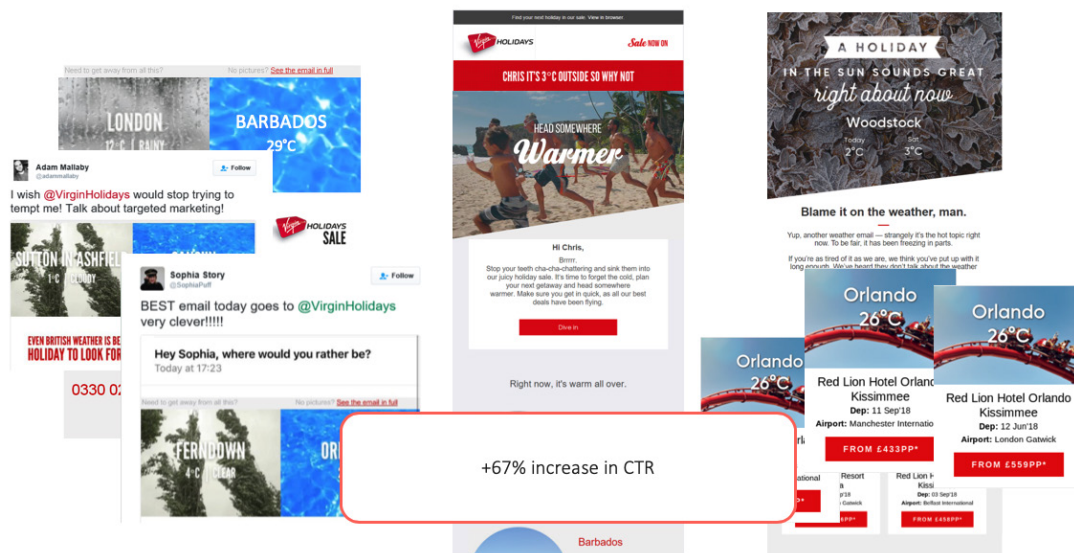
**20%**

**retain information from  
what they read**

Movable Ink are able to take not only your audience data, but website browsing data, social data, live polling data and more, put it all together and deliver an interactive experience that is unique not only to that person, but can change depending on when or where the person opens it. And you can do all this by adding a bit of code into your email via your current ESP. The result becomes a uniquely tailored, relevant, visually engaging email campaign. They even allow for live data from the email itself, changing visuals every time a recipient revisits the email.

After interviewing several clients and using their total economic impact methodology, Forrester found that brands can generate a 373% ROI from using Movable Ink over a three-year period. Even more interesting, as clients used Movable Ink in more campaigns and in more sophisticated ways, they saw their ROI increase. The report also highlighted a 3 months payback on investment and a 40% reduction in the campaign production time, as so much of the content is handled automatically by live updates. So, let's take a look at an example.

In the example below Virgin Holidays experienced a 67% CTR using something as simple as a live weather update for the recipient. Quite astonishing really.





## Case Study: Altaire

Altaire is a company that loves to challenge what's possible in email, they also like to make sure as many people as possible benefit. Their team of email developers use a real device lab to test every email they build and every piece of technology they create. This means all potential issues are pre-empted in real-life situations. Their emails are fully tested and working at the time of deployment.

Of course, the very nature of email means that things keep changing and email clients are continually updating. So, while Altaire is pushing the boundaries, sometimes the boundaries push back. Every month the developers test their technology against their device lab to make sure they still work with email clients, regardless of updates.

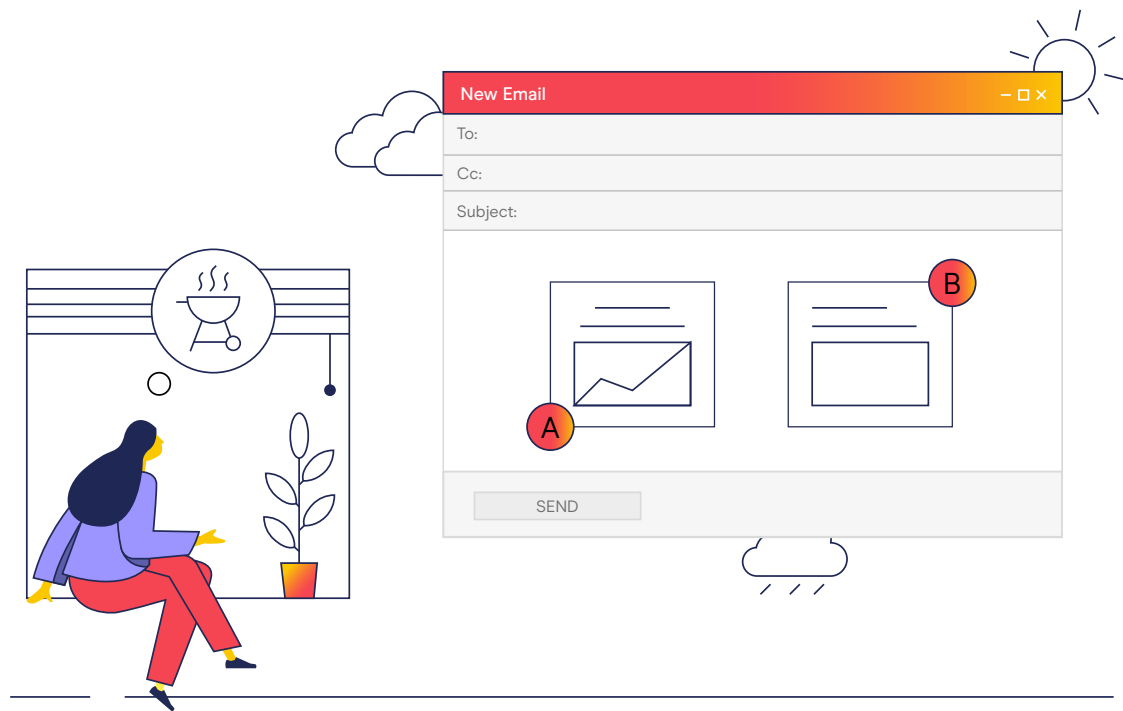
They boast a whole host of tech solutions to use in their emails coming from four categories:

- Contextual content
- Live content
- Interactive content
- Animated content

Each of these are designed to grab the customer's attention so they click through. So far, the results are fantastic, increasing interaction with the emails that deployed the tech. Here's a quick overview of some of the most effective.

**Contextual content:** This personalises the email to such a level that almost each one is unique to the individual customer reading it. All the options available work from the point of open and optimise themselves according to the data they receive.

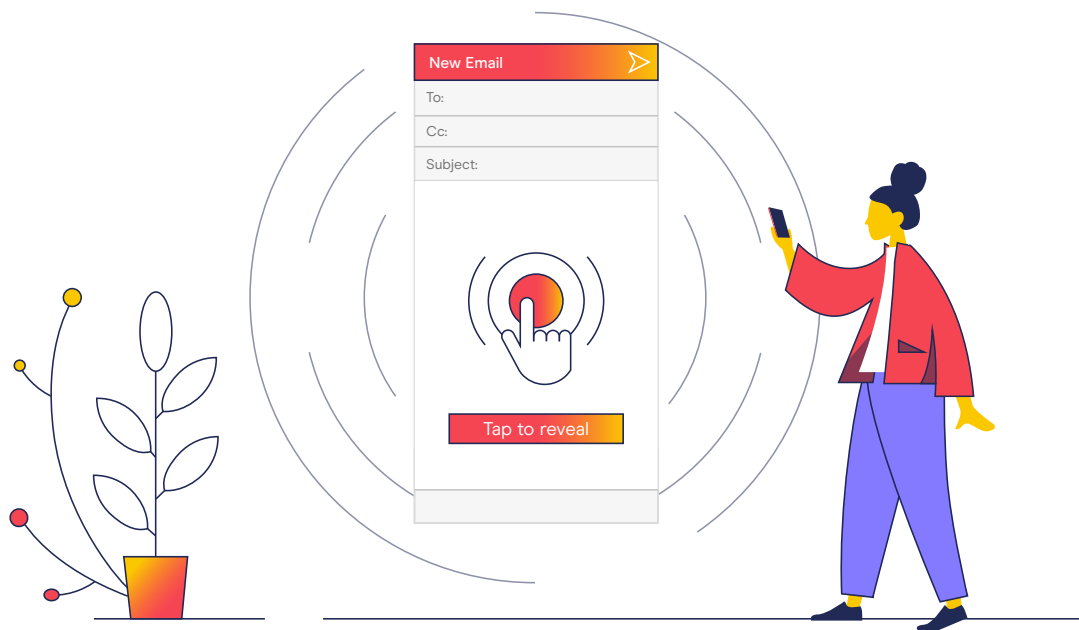
For instance, it's entirely possible to change the content depending on the weather. As bank holidays in the UK are so utterly unpredictable, this means a company can have different versions all set up to go and only those in an area where it's raining will have content for indoor activity. Meanwhile, the lucky few with the rare burst of bank holiday sunshine get to think about barbeques, or whatever else the email may suggest.



**Live content:** If contextual content stems from the point of open, live content is all about keeping up to date in real-time. Want to keep an eye on the betting odds of a game, then no problem. Your email will show you the live odds, constantly updating to make sure it's accurate. One of the most impressive is the clock; no matter what time of day you open the email, it will correctly display the time and continue accurately ticking round while you're in the email.

**Interactive content:** this requires some interaction from the customer, a tap here or a tap there to see everything the email has to offer. While the previous lot are purely functional, these elements add some fun to the user experience.

Tap and Reveal is one of the most popular, it intrigues the customer by hiding a layer with an enticing cover, once they click the CTA their offer or prize is unveiled.



Interactive content also provides a way to make the whole experience more convenient. With active search the customer can search whatever takes their fancy and go straight to the page on the website. This decreases the amount of clicks it takes to get to their destination.

**Animated content:** Again, this brings some fun to the email, but this time doesn't need any interaction from the customer. One of the most popular forms of animated content is a GIF, but Altaire pushes that further and offers alternatives. The most effective is the pan and zoom, this animation zooms into an image and pans across it to several points. With this capacity for a story narrative it's much better for showing the customer the benefits of what's offered.

Tech is important for the advancement of emails. Attention spans are getting shorter and it's necessary to have a way of holding people for longer. The creation of new tech also makes it essential to keep improving code in emails for the best possible experience.



### Case study: Kickdynamic and P&O

P&O identified the need for a specific pre-sail email to reduce travel anxiety, provide personalised trip information and encourage the purchase of trip extras.

P&O wanted to create an innovative, postcard type email but, with a lot of content to show, they needed something extra. Using kinetic code and live, automated email content they created a visually stunning, interactive email that requires minimal upkeep from their small team.

They decided to create a specific pre-departure email to be sent 24 hours before passengers' travel. They didn't want to create a typical pre-travel email, they aimed to deliver a fun, stand out experience that delivered the content our passengers need before they set sail.

P&O have successfully created a visually stunning, highly personalised email using kinetic code and live, automated email content. Email content is populated at open time, combining CRM data and advanced dynamic content based on hundreds of variants including ship specifics, RFM metrics, booking information and traveler type.

The email also includes live sailing and traffic updates around the port and the live exchange rate for passengers to reserve currency to collect onboard. In addition to the intricacies of the content, the email needed to render seamlessly on mobile, tablet and desktop devices.

Using device recognition at open time, the email displays different image versions optimised based on the device the email is being viewed on. From one HTML, thousands of personalised variations of the email can be automatically generated – always containing the latest content. Leveraging live content and dynamic automation using CRM data, the email requires minimal upkeep from the team.

P&O wanted a short, 'postcard' style email rather than a long email that required a lot of scrolling. The kinetic coding elevates the personalised content with a 'slide' like mechanism to view the content in the inbox. The eye-catching movement showcases important content in the prime real estate of the email.

A high level of engagement from travelers has been seen across all five of the content pods in the email. There is a trend in travelers returning to view the email multiple times as they check back to explore other content slides, interacting with the slide most relevant to them at each open. Across the board results have been hugely positive with increases in total opens, total clicks and click-through rates. P&O have created a truly exceptional pre-travel email.



The email is visually stunning, and the results speak for themselves.  
The feedback both from customers and internally has been fantastic.

**Kim Verlinde,**  
Direct Marketing Manager



### Case study: Fresh Relevance and Viovet

As one of the UK's largest and most trusted veterinary supplies retailers, VioVet Ltd's website is a rich resource, filled with leading brand products and information for pet owners. The company was looking for a way to help customers to make the right decision regarding food and medications, and in doing so improve sales. The solution was Fresh Relevance and its real-time personalisation platform for email, mobile and web.

VioVet worked closely with a Strategic Consultant from Fresh Relevance's Professional Services team, to identify areas where customers would leave without making a purchase, and uncovered opportunities for significant sales growth.

Marketing Manager at VioVet Ltd, Verity Beaton, explains how the company is now helping visitors to make the right choices. "In addition to ensuring we have all the information visitors need and making it easily accessible online, we took the decision to expand our use of cart and browse abandonment emails and introduce specialist triggered messages."


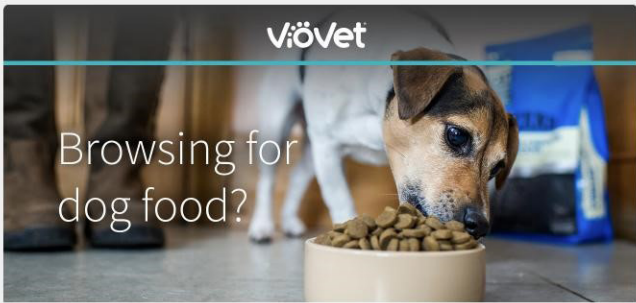
Fresh Relevance integrates with VioVet's bespoke eCommerce system, ensuring these education-led emails are sent to visitors within one hour of them leaving the website. "We identified and targeted the areas that were resulting in the highest levels of abandonment, which we felt could deliver the highest returns," explains Verity.

Each visitor receives a timely email with expert information and advice relating to the specific pages they had been viewing. For example, if a visitor was viewing the horse worming page, the email they receive will include VioVet's 'A Quick Guide to Horse Worming', likewise, browsing dog food will ensure they are sent advice on 'Choosing the right commercial diet for your dog.' VioVet has also introduced Fresh Relevance SmartBlocks into these communications to display relevant associated products.

Within a few months VioVet was reaping the rewards, "this new initiative is performing incredibly well, with the horse worming emails alone generating an additional £1.02 per email sent." Verity adds: "Open rates for all our specialist triggered emails are extremely impressive, with prescription medications emails achieving a 48% open rate, compared to a 32% open rate for our more general browse abandonment emails, which is impressive in its own right."



However, the company has been able to improve the success of its emails even further, by being one of the first organisations to introduce Fresh Relevance's Ratings & Reviews functionality. The new feature integrates with VioVet's own in-house star rating system, ensuring every product recommendation, cart and browse abandonment email automatically display the latest relevant customer ratings. This has resulted in a 19% increase in click-throughs. Verity concludes: "The expertise and guidance from the Fresh Relevance Professional Services Team has been instrumental and invaluable in conceiving and creating this campaign. Our customers are better informed and therefore feel more confident in making the right purchasing decision, and that is reflected in our improved sales figures."



# Browsing for dog food?

Hi Ella

## Choosing the right commercial diet for your dog


By VioVet Blogger **Hannah Dyball** in **Pet Care**.

Did you know that switching to a more expensive diet could save you money in the long-run?


With so many dog foods on the market nowadays, deciding which one is right for your dog can be a confusing process. Yes, variety is a good thing, but too much of it can make the decision more difficult. Dry or wet food? Commercial kibble or home-cooked? Leading brand or supermarket own? Breed or life stage specific? When it comes to dog food, navigating our options is a bit of a minefield...

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**Case study: LiveClicker and Dunhill:**

Dunhill recently partnered with Liveclicker to improve the way it promoted its presence at the upcoming Fashion Week in Paris. Specifically, Dunhill wanted to generate higher levels of interest and anticipation for the prestigious Men's Fashion Show. The retailer also hoped to give its audience a real-time look at the live event—and its latest fashions—using live-streaming video.

While the Dunhill marketing team came up with many ideas for creating such an engaging email campaign, the actual execution was an obstacle. They were limited by the fact that Dunhill did not have any in-house developers or other technical resources capable of adding such advanced functionality to emails.

Dunhill discovered Liveclicker's real-time email personalisation platform was easily customised with many different elements, many of which were perfect for its email marketing objectives. The Dunhill team worked closely with Liveclicker's account management team to brainstorm campaign ideas that would deliver an engaging experience—and real results.

Dunhill's management team was impressed with the high-end, engaging experiences these emails produced, especially related to the countdown timer and live-streaming video. These emails were perfectly aligned, highly engaging and highly effective.

Using Liveclicker tools, the Dunhill marketing team developed a highly engaging three-touch email campaign: the first email featured a trailer video to build excitement for the Paris Fashion Week. Built using the LiveVideo element and delivered as a seamless component in the email itself, the video impressed recipients while promoting Dunhill's participation in the fashion show.

The next email touch featured a countdown timer, which was set to 15 minutes before the show started and announced a pending live stream. Then, once the show started, the timer and related imagery were replaced by a live-streaming video of the event. All of this was made possible with Liveclicker's moment-of-open technology.

The third and final email contained a recording of the fashion show as well as product images and a call to action encouraging the audience to click for more highlights from the show. Liveclicker was the ideal partner, capable of providing the features and advanced functionality it needed to bring its campaign ideas to life.

This resulted in;



17%

Increase in unique clicks  
over a previous show-  
promotion campaign



35%

Increase in total reach



17%

Click rate—triple that of a  
competitive brand



35%

Improvement in  
unsubscribe rates

Liveclicker's flexible integration architecture, rich partner ecosystem and extensive email expertise help clients execute highly relevant email marketing programs that respond to each recipient's constantly changing personal context.

The campaign also had the added benefit of producing actual conversions and sales, unexpected results from a campaign whose primary objective was branding. When summarising the overall experience, one Dunhill executive said it best: “The effort required to produce the campaign was minimal, but the results were significant.”



# / Compatibility

The output of real-time content is almost always an image, so anywhere that images are supported, also supports real-time content. Likewise, any sending technology/ESP that can handle images & HTML can handle real-time content.

When video and animated GIF content is used (for example with countdowns), some users won't see the full experience.

Animated GIFs are not supported in Outlook 2007 onwards and will fall back to a static image (typically the first frame of the animation).

True, playable video is only supported iOS, and will fall back to a static or animated GIF for other users. Most tools provide fallback automatically, although these still tend to be image based.

The main challenge to compatibility for real-time content comes when images aren't available. This can happen for a few reasons — the recipient may have images disabled in their email client, they may be using a screen reader (or other assistive technology) or they might simply not have enough mobile data coverage.

As a result, marketers should consider the experience of their email campaign when the real-time content is not available. It is recommended to use real-time content as additional content, and not the core message.

# / Conclusion

While email is a tried and tested stoical player in a digital marketer's arsenal, it has always evolved at a much slower pace than other mediums. This is because unlike the so-called trendier mediums, such as social media and apps, email has to follow a series of protocols to even be seen, and these are governed by a mix of parties that have little consult with each other: the ISP, the ESP, the email client, the person writing the code and so on.

This makes it very difficult not only to employ new tech quickly, but also to get buy in from everyone needed to make it what we term as 'universal'. And then, on top of that, the phrase 'if it aint broke' will play heavily on the mind of marketers that generate not only reach and retention but physical revenue from their campaigns. After all they're all reportable to someone whose making sure they get results. However, in this case, it's more along the lines of 'fortune favours the brave'.

RTC is here, it works and the examples above and buy-in from brands, agencies and technologies looking to integrate is enough to create a strong statement that campaigns can benefit from being more engaging, interactive and in line with other web based experiences. What's more it genuinely increases those bottom-line stats you're after and in many cases, effective RTC based campaigns can boast some significantly higher returns and are well worth the investment.

Why not stop playing the balancing act and go all-out for engagement? After all, the more we entice people to interact with our brands, the more we get out of our campaigns - not just in terms of revenue, but data and analysis, feedback and exposure, enjoyment and satisfaction. We seem to employ new technologies one campaign at a time - maybe your next campaign could jump to life with a sexy bit of RDC. There you go we said it - RTC is sexy.

# / About the Data & Marketing Association

The Data & Marketing Association (DMA) comprises the DMA, Institute of Data & Marketing (IDM) and DMA Talent.

We seek to guide and inspire industry leaders; to advance careers; and to nurture the next generation of aspiring marketers.

We champion the way things should be done, through a rich fusion of technology, diverse talent, creativity, insight – underpinned by our customer-focused principles.

We set the standards marketers must meet in order to thrive, representing over 1,000 members drawn from the UK's data and marketing landscape.

By working responsibly, sustainably and creatively, together we will drive the data and marketing industry forward to meet the needs of people today and tomorrow.

[www.dma.org.uk](http://www.dma.org.uk)

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