How to Build a Strong Email Call to Action (CTA)

SendGrid®

According to The Radicati Group's Email Statistics Report for 2013—2017, over 100 billion business emails are sent and received every day.

To cut through the clutter, marketers need to focus their efforts on content, but more specifically on a strong call to action (CTA).

Read the report »

Build

What's Inside

Call-to-Actions (CTA) are often the most neglected, but most critical piece of content marketing. As a prime email engagement tool, your CTA determines if your email drives a response. Whether it be to make a purchase, download a whitepaper, or share your content, your CTA has one responsibility— to generate a click.
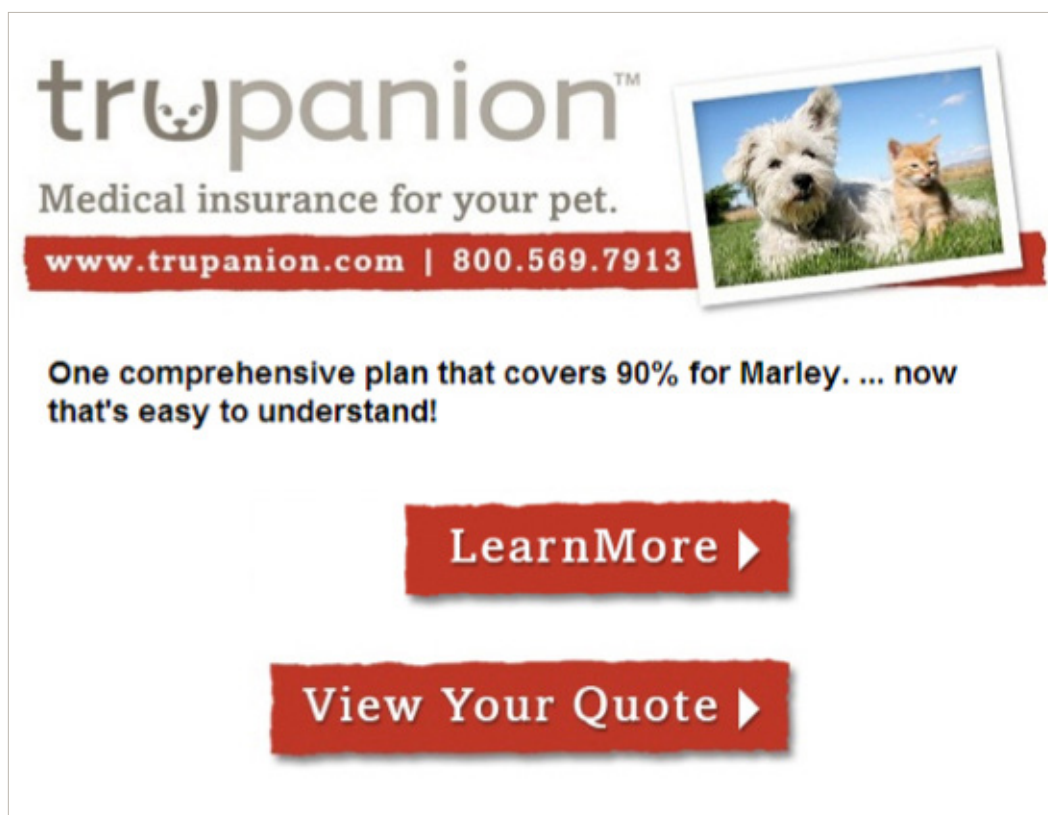
To point you in the right direction, here are some tips around placement, content, and design to help you evaluate and improve your emails so that they produce the response they deserve.

01. Placement

02. Content

03. Design

04. Be Creative

01 Placement

Placement depends on how long or short your copy is and what you want your subscribers to do. Short copy usually lends itself to bold CTAs, taking the role as the closer. Longer copy tends to integrate the call to action in multiple places to give the reader several opportunities to engage, even if they don't read the entire message.

While these are general rules of thumb, there are exceptions—so the key here is to make sure your reader can clearly see what you want them to do without distraction.

FIGURE 1 *Trupanion communicates their main value proposition and then invites you to learn more or view your quote.*

Top Tips

» Design your email and write your copy around your CTA.

» Make it bold and prominent.

» Don't clutter the space with a CTA that's too big or diminish it with one that is too small.

» Consider (tactful) multiple placements to draw the eye of the reader.

In some cases, more than one CTA is appropriate. It ultimately depends on the goal of your email. Do you want people to sign up and drive revenue? Then only one is necessary. Are you trying to get your users to interact in various ways? Then add different options for them to choose how they'd like to do so (email, blog, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) like Uber does below. Whether you use one, or multiple CTAs, always be clear on the action that you'd like your user to take and showcase the benefit they'll receive from taking that action.
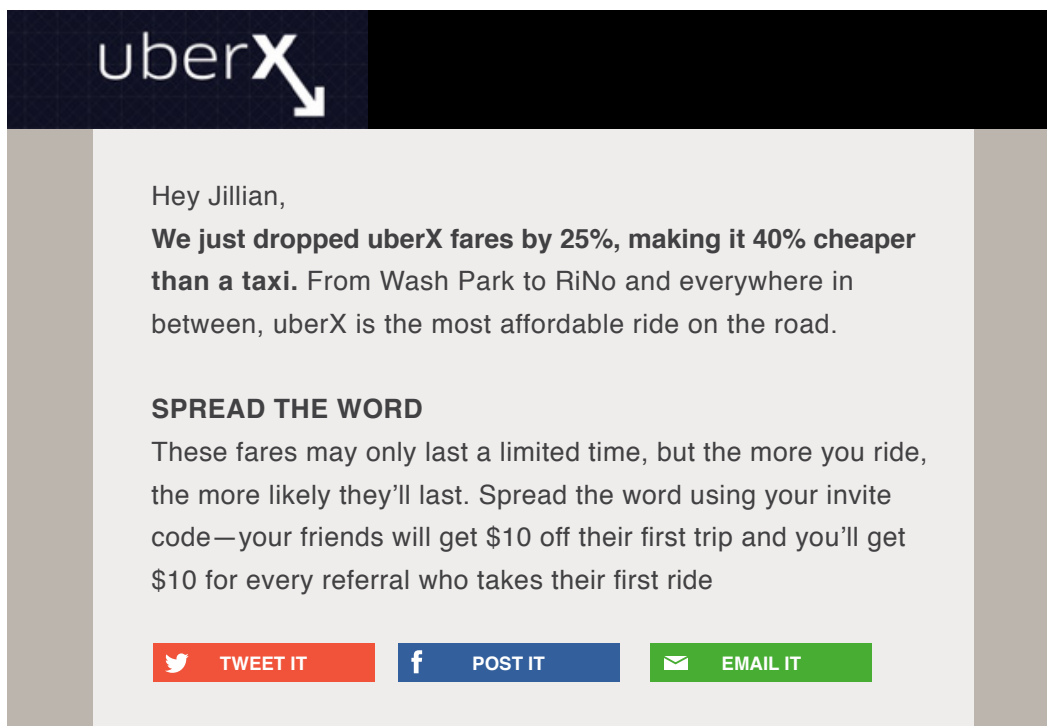

FIGURE 2 *Uber offers 3 CTAs focused around social engagement.*

02 Content

Your CTA should meet two main objectives:

» Objective #1: Tell the reader what to do.

Rely on the main message of your email to showcase the benefit and leave the closing to the CTA. Keep your CTAs short and sweet, providing clear direction as to next steps. Use phrases like *Shop Now*, *Learn More*, *Request a Demo*, or *Register Now*. Only add additional information if it provides added value to the reader, or as Joanna Wiebe from **Copy Hackers** suggests, if it reduces anxiety for the user. To make the decision to click less nerve-wracking for a user, she suggests adding a proof point next to the button, like a customer testimonial. **(Read more tips from Joanna here.)**

FIGURE 3 *Gap shows the value of including more than one CTA by giving users the choice to either shop online now, or locate a store.*
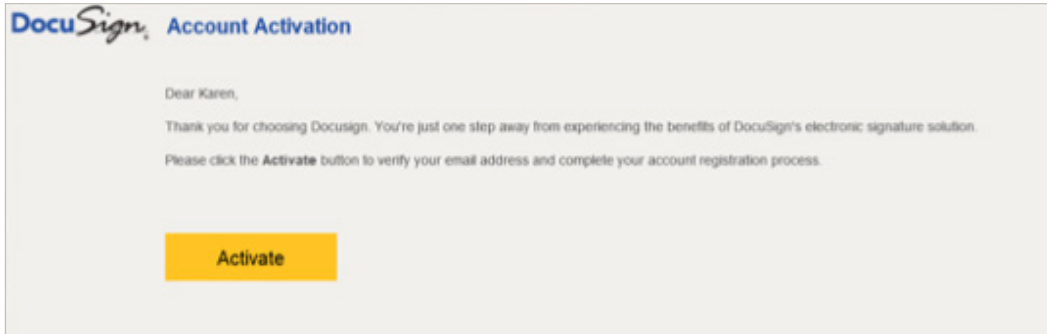
DocuSign only requires the user to take one action, so only one, clear CTA is needed.

ⓥ Objective #2: Deliver on your promise.

When the user clicks on your CTA there should be a direct connection between the email message, the CTA, and the destination. Drive the subscriber to a landing page or web page with a directive that is contextually relevant to your email and to the destination. For instance, don't make the user click on *Register Now* and lead them to your homepage. Instead, direct them to a landing page with a form that provides instant gratification. The last thing you want is for the reader to feel let down when they went through all the effort to click on your message.

Top Tips

» Don't be too wordy. Instead be clear and direct, so there is no ambiguity around what action your user should take.

» Create a sense of urgency by adding the words *now* or *today* to your CTA copy.

» Only add extra information if it will encourage the desired action.

» Connect the destination directly to the CTA.

03

Design

Using a text link vs. a button can be a marketing conundrum. When considering which to use, look beyond the aesthetics and think about how your users will view your email message.

Take into account which device your subscribers are using (web, smartphone, tablet, etc.). Images show up differently (and sometimes not at all) making it imperative that you design your email to accommodate the majority of your subscriber base.

FIGURE 5 *Parents Magazine includes six links plus a button to encourage the reader to take an action.*

The most important thing is that your call to action is clearly visible and actionable. Focus on functionality, but employ workarounds to give you the look and feel you desire. For instance, instead of using an image for a CTA button, build it in HTML instead to be sure the majority of your subscribers can actually see it. Alternatively, use both. Include a text link and a button to give you the best of both worlds. And never underestimate the power of alt tags to get your user to download images.

FIGURE 6 *eMarketer deploys a communication for Quantcast in which they use both text links and a CTA button to encourage a download.*

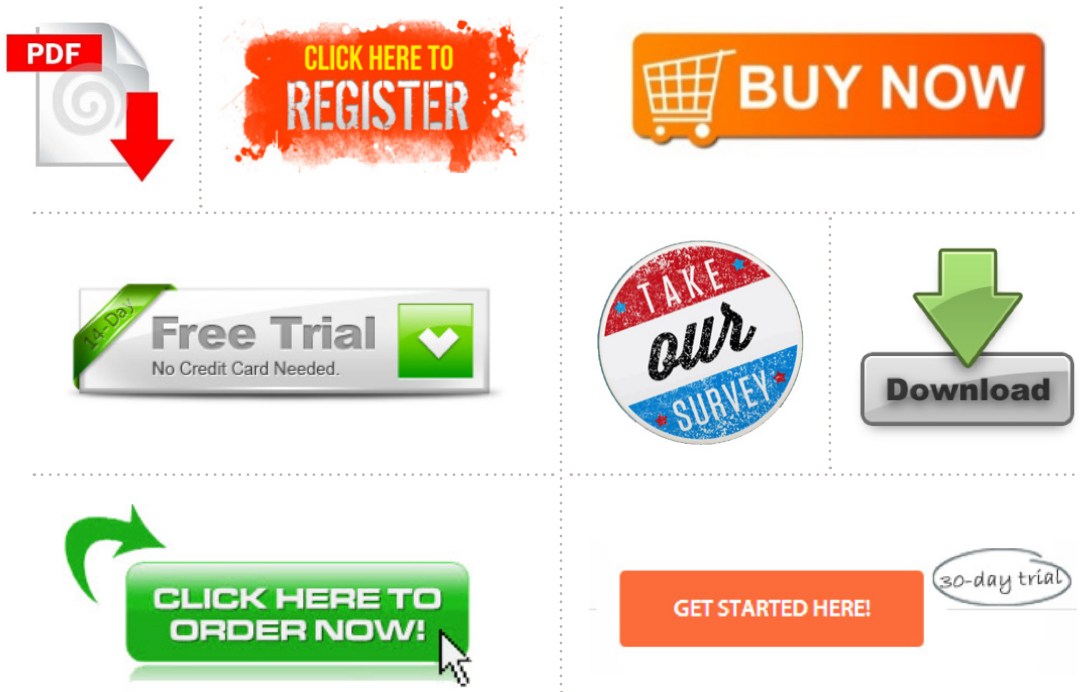*At SendGrid, we employed both a text and HTML CTA to encourage users to attend our email tour.*

Top Tips

» Use color to draw the user's attention.

» Use icons if you feel it adds value and speaks a universal language.

» Use two different colors if you have two CTAs,
   but highlight the most important one.

» Test your emails in various readers to be sure your
   call to action is clearly visible with images off.

04

Be Creative

» Examples of CTAs

However, you don't have to use the same old CTA all the time. Again, you want to grab your readers' attention, so tap your designers to come up with some unique and interesting ways to put a new twist on a common phrase. Some of the most common CTAs (with variations) are:

» Add to Cart	» Find out more	» Share This
» Buy Now	» Join today	» Sign In
» Apply Now	» Learn more	» Sign Up Today
» Contact Us	» Log In	» Take the survey
» Download Now	» Order Now	» Tell your friends
» Enter to win	» Register Now	
» Free trial	» Request More Info	

The Bottom Line

The call to action is the strongest, most important piece of content you will ever include in your email. Therefore, take time to consider its placement, wording, and design when conceiving your email messages.

Also, don't be afraid to use your creativity to highlight your brand, create urgency, and build excitement. And above all else, test your CTAs on a regular basis to find the best performers. The only way to truly know if your CTA is as good as it can be is to continuously test and monitor your results. It's hard to believe that one button could have so much power, but if you plan right, you can significantly increase email engagement and conversion.

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About SendGrid

SendGrid helps you focus on your business without the cost and complexity of owning and maintaining an email infrastructure. We manage all of the technical details, from scaling infrastructure, to ISP outreach and reputation monitoring, to whitelist services and real-time analytics. We offer world-class deliverability expertise to make sure your emails get delivered, handle ISP monitoring, DKIM, domain keys, SPF, feedback loops, whitelabeling, link customization, and more. To learn more, visit **www.sendgrid.com**.