



The Future of Email in 2020 & Beyond



Email marketing is notorious for changing frequently—and changing fast. With so many things to keep up with, how do you know what to prioritize? What’s really going to matter in 10 more years?

With the help of our savvy team members and top thought leaders around the email industry, we predict what the next decade holds for email design, strategy, teams, technology, and privacy.

Spoiler alert: The future will be bright for email teams that can master the strategies and technologies that keep the email channel vibrant, relevant, and customer-centric. But the best teams will understand how email integrates with other channels to power overall marketing success, too.

What does the future hold for..

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Create Better Email, Faster

Join more than 600,000 marketing professionals who use Litmus to efficiently create high-performing email campaigns.



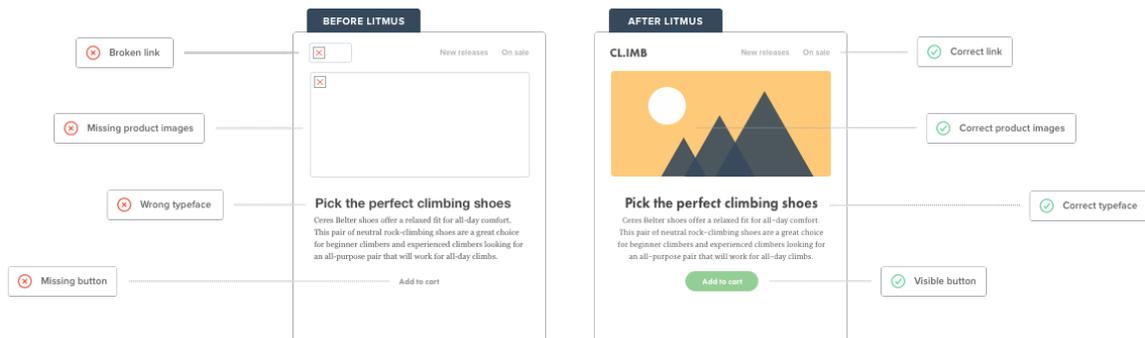


Who Is Litmus?

Litmus is passionate about email marketing research, because our mission is to help brands get access to the knowledge and tools they need to send better email. Through our industry-leading [blog](#), [Litmus Live conferences](#), [ebooks](#), [webinars](#), [Delivering Podcast](#), [Community](#), and more, we discuss best practices and explore trends to help your team stay on the forefront of the industry.

We are also passionate about software that makes creating high-performing email easy. Marketers use the Litmus Platform alongside their existing email service providers to ensure a consistently great brand experience for every subscriber, work more efficiently, accelerate campaign performance, reduce errors, and stay out of the spam folder.

Email marketing is complex. But through hands-on advice and software you can trust, we enable your team to do their best work—creating innovative, on-brand campaigns that engage and delight audiences. With the Litmus Platform, you'll have the tools and insights you need to provide your customers with an incredible email experience—and get the best results in return.



Keep Up with the Latest in Email

Join over 300,000 email marketing pros who rely on Litmus for expert advice and analysis. Sign up for our emails to get the Litmus newsletter, notifications of new reports and executive summaries, announcements of upcoming webinars and events, and more.





What does the future hold?

Email's Role in the Overall Marketing Mix

Email will move to the core of a successful marketing organization

The decade of the 2010s didn't kill email, as so many people predicted it would. Far from it! As we move into the 2020s, we see that email is not just alive and kicking—it's driving results like no other channel does. With an [ROI of 42:1](#), email marketing is more effective than ever, outperforming other channels by a long shot.

“Every new channel wishes to be as successful as email, which is why so many have proclaimed themselves email-killers. RSS, mobile, Facebook, Slack—they all declared that email is dead.

But email marketing has only become more powerful and more relevant over the past two decades. The coming decade will be no different. Looking to free themselves from their dependence on paid Facebook and Google ads, smart brands will invest heavily in building out their email marketing relationships and capabilities.”

Chad S. White



Head of Research, [Oracle CX Marketing Consulting](#) | Author, [Email Marketing Rules](#)

In the next decade: More brands will recognize email as the most reliable, most personal, and highest-performing channel in their marketing toolkits—and that means email will move from the sidelines to the core of a successful marketing mix.

Email has the power to inform other marketing channels—and drive overall marketing success

Email marketing is your most measurable channel. You can measure overall campaign performance—like open, click-through, and conversion rates—but an email address as a unique identifier also gives you a glimpse into each subscriber's behavior and preferences.

For each subscriber who interacts with your messages, you can learn what content resonates the most, how long they engage with your email, and whether or not your email leads to a conversion. You can learn about your subscribers on an individual level. No other channel provides that level of insight.

Plus, your subscribers have actively opted in to hearing from you; they're looking to learn about your brand, your product, and your promotions. They're the most closely aligned to your prospect audience and best able to show what they most want to hear about.

In the next decade: Email marketers already have access to invaluable data with the power to inform and optimize marketing activities across the organization. Coming up, they'll use that power to fuel overall marketing success.

A more integrated approach to marketing, with email at the core

To be successful in 2020 and beyond, email marketers can no longer afford to stay in their channel silos, because that's not how your customers experience your brand, either. While a strong email program will be the foundation of a successful marketing organization, the tight integration with other channels will set mediocre email marketing programs apart from the outstanding ones.

“Becoming more customer-centric means taking a more holistic approach to marketing. We have to focus on the customer journey because if we focus on each marketing channel in isolation, that’s when we give the customer a disjointed journey. Email is now and will be in the foreseeable future the backbone to the customer journey until another channel comes along that supersedes email.”

Kath Pay
Founder, [Holistic Email Marketing](#)



In the next decade: Successful marketers will be the ones who can use their knowledge, expertise, and technology to break down the last remaining silos in their organizations, thus freeing their data to create the broadest picture possible of their customers and the ways to communicate with them.



What does the future hold?

Email Strategy

Email strategy will become more personalized and targeted by necessity

The 2010s proved decisively that message relevance drives email marketing success, and personalization was the key to achieving relevance. We also understood that relevance is what customers want to receive, not just what companies want to send.

New tools developed over the last 10 years allow brands at all experience levels to send more relevant messages by personalizing them through targeted and triggered messaging based on interests, preferences, behavior, and profiles.

“We need to bring marketing back into email marketing, as marketers care not just about their results, but also about the consumer, and they want to enhance the customer experience, of which lifecycle campaigns and a robust strategic approach will give you the results.”

Kath Pay

Founder, [Holistic Email Marketing](#)



In the next decade: Personalization is quickly being overtaken by hyper-personalization, not only in email messaging but in touch points far beyond the inbox. Brands that have resisted the personalization wave will find their reliance on one-size-fits-all email might shut them out of the inbox as customers grow more apathetic to their messages—and ISPs use that apathy to give preferential treatment to brands more in tune with their customers.



What does the future hold?

Email Privacy and Security

Before the European Union's [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#) went into effect in May 2018, we heard dire predictions that the new, stricter laws would shrink email lists, throttle new opt-ins, and damage marketers' use of email to achieve their business goals. Marketing teams everywhere became afraid that their lists would shrink along with their ROI.

Strict anti-spam laws are not the death of email—they make it better

The truth is, marketers shouldn't be afraid of tighter anti-spam regulations. Research into the impact of GDPR on email marketers indicates that stricter regulations are actually a good thing for marketers.

A clear majority of email marketers have not suffered the major list damage the doomsayers predicted, with 60% of brands who comply in full or in part with GDPR saying they saw either [no effect on list size or a loss of less than 10%](#). The UK DMA's 2019 Marketer Email Tracker Report [found](#) 56% of UK email marketers were positive about the impact GDPR is having on their operations. Among the responses, 41% said opt-out rates decreased, while 55% said spam complaints were down and 55% said email deliverability had improved.

Unengaged and inactive subscribers have little to no value to your email program, and GDPR has forced many brands to remove these email addresses from their mailing lists. While a cut in list size can feel like a loss to many email marketers, it can actually improve the performance of a brand's email program.

“Leading marketers understand that respecting subscribers’ privacy and putting their audience in full control of what information they’d like to receive is the secret to effective email—and embracing privacy laws like GDPR or CCPA is an important step on that journey.”

Bettina Specht

Senior Marketing Manager, Litmus



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In the next decade: Brands will have no choice but to embrace new privacy regulations. If they don't, they're dangerously out of sync with customer expectations and also risk significant fines by the authorities. In January 2020, the [California Consumer Privacy Act \(CCPA\)](#) went into effect and is considered a precursor to a national standard. More states and countries will step up when it comes to raising the bar for consumer protection worldwide, and consumers will have more control than ever when it comes to what email they receive and when.

The best programs will stay compliant and make subscriber retention a priority

Regulations like GDPR and CCPA result in better email marketing experiences for everyone, forcing brands to finally implement best practices that have been around for a long time. The size of subscriber lists is important—but the best email marketers know the performance matters more. Plus, since many of the email acquisition tactics that brands relied on to grow their lists are no longer compliant under GDPR and other laws, a focus on retaining subscribers will be more important than ever.

There's a natural ebb and flow when it comes to unsubscribes. There are plenty of [unsubscribe methods](#) out there, and not all of them are ideal. Some of them make subscribers feel ignored, lack empathy, and are overly complicated. Keeping subscriber retention in mind, it's more important than ever to provide your subscribers with options—maybe they want to “snooze” emails from you for a while, or only want to hear from you a certain number of times a month, or only for certain topics. If you provide options for what kind of communications they'll receive, you'll find that subscribers will be more likely to stay connected with your brand.

In the next decade: Consumer privacy will become the highest priority, but interest in email won't go away. Email marketers must respect their subscribers' privacy and allow them to unsubscribe at any time. Offering the option to opt-down can be a powerful way to stop subscribers from cutting the cord with your brand, but in times where subscribers are in full control of what marketing they'd like to receive, brands have to focus more than ever on one thing: Focusing on hyper-personalized and targeted campaigns that provide true value to your subscribers and will keep subscribers interested.



What does the future hold?

Email Design

It's the decade of animation and interactivity

From emoticons :-) to emoji 😊 in less than 10 years!

Nothing else symbolizes how our communication habits have evolved from words to imagery. Email now mirrors that preference for visuals over text. Images in messages overcame early programming and rendering issues to become standard content features.

The evolution continues as consumer preferences switch from still images to animation and video. [91%](#) of consumers prefer interactive and visual content over traditional, text-based, or static media. We watch more video than ever, but email has been slow to catch up because in-message video doesn't deliver a reliably uniform experience for subscribers.

Instead, we've seen a steady rise of animation and interactivity in email. The majority of brands now regularly use [animated GIFs](#) to add movement to their campaigns.

The 2010s also saw the development of interactive technology, creating the possibility that email could be more than just a vehicle to deliver buyers to websites.

While becoming increasingly popular, interactivity in email [hasn't made it to the email mainstream yet](#). In the 2020s we expect that to change. As the new decade opens, technology like AMP for Email is close to making that vision come true.

"I think interactivity will be the next big thing in the email industry. The design of emails will depend on the new interactive features that email clients and browsers will allow us to create. An important aspect depends on email security, making interactivity and email security two factors that will rule the development of interaction design in emails moving forward."

Andrian Valeanu
Founder, [Designmodo](#)



In the next decade: Interactivity will overcome tech and email client limitations to deliver on its promise as a strong driver of subscriber engagement and action. The tipping point toward widespread acceptance of email interactivity is near, but concerns about email security, compatibility, and enough support from brands, email clients, and customers will determine how fast it moves from experimental stage to standard feature.

New technologies like AMP for Email continue to divide email marketers

It's not hard to start a fight among email people. Email interactivity, especially Google's AMP for Email, is one of those topics that marketers and developers can debate for hours. Now that more inbox providers and sending services are announcing support for the new technology, layered on top of HTML, a groundswell is beginning to develop. But it still faces an uncertain near-term future with questions about its accessibility and viability beyond a few test brands.

“AMP for Email may not be the best solution for enriching the inbox, but it's no longer a solution we can ignore. I'm excited—if a little tentative—to see how it changes the email marketing landscape and subscribers' expectations of what can be done in the inbox.”

Jason Rodriguez

Community & Product Evangelist | Host of the podcast [“Delivering.”](#) Litmus



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In the next decade: The next couple of years will be the proving ground for AMP for Email. Gmail's dominant share of the email client market paves the way for wider acceptance, but even if developers and inbox providers can resolve all the issues, the users themselves will have the final word.



What does the future hold?

Email Teams

Demand for emails—and the talent to support them—will increase

The creative and managerial skills that made email an essential marketing and revenue channel at the turn of the 20th century aren't the only ones that will move email into the core of the marketing mix for the next decade.

The one- or two-person team that could manage to build a weekly newsletter or daily promotion is no longer enough to handle the growing variety and technological, data, and reporting demands of a successful 21st century email program.

In [Litmus' 2019 State of Email Workflows report](#), we found smaller teams (1 to 3 full-time employees) were working with 1 to 5 emails at a time, while teams of 11 or more have 21 to 25 emails in varying states of production. The email channel continues to drive results, so brands are looking to send more and better emails—and they're willing to spend more. In 2019, [33% of brands were planning to increase their budget for email team personnel](#).

“Email is being taken more seriously than it has been in past years. The C-suite is beginning to understand that investing in profitable email programs makes them even more profitable, rather than just settling for the returns they are getting from the channel.

Organizations are realizing that the people they hire to drive the marketing automation tool (email marketing specialists or managers) aren't the same people they need to truly leverage the technology to increase ROI. A higher level person is needed, either a full-time employee or a consultant, who develops and oversees email optimization strategy on an ongoing basis.”

Jeanne Jennings

Founder & Lead Strategist, [Email Optimization Shop](#)



In the next decade: Marketers will need to make room on the bench for more players. Besides creative geniuses, teams will need technical marketers who understand the weirdness of the email channels and

stay on top of new technological trends. Equally important will be strategists with the vision to look beyond day-to-day business needs to envision wider uses of email throughout the organization.

When email is part of a truly integrated program, email marketers must embrace other channels, too

It's not just channel specialists that will be in high demand. As marketing teams embrace a truly integrated mindset and brands begin to look at the email channel to drive cross-channel campaign success, there will also be an increased need for marketers that understand both the email channel itself and its interaction with other channels.

*“As email teams prove their worth as effective marketers within the organization, it helps show the team as thought leaders and strategists for groups **outside** of marketing.”*

Lauren Kremer

Marketing Operations Lead, [ProQuest](#)

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In the next decade: Having working knowledge in other disciplines will become more crucial than ever for people looking to take on leadership roles in email marketing. Prepare yourself and your team for future success by learning more about channels that are about to get more closely intertwined with email—social media, paid media, content marketing, just to name a few—to prepare for the decade of truly connected marketing programs.

*“Good email marketers understand the email channel—but the **best** marketers understand how email integrates with all marketing channels and can power cross-channel campaigns that span the entire marketing organization.”*

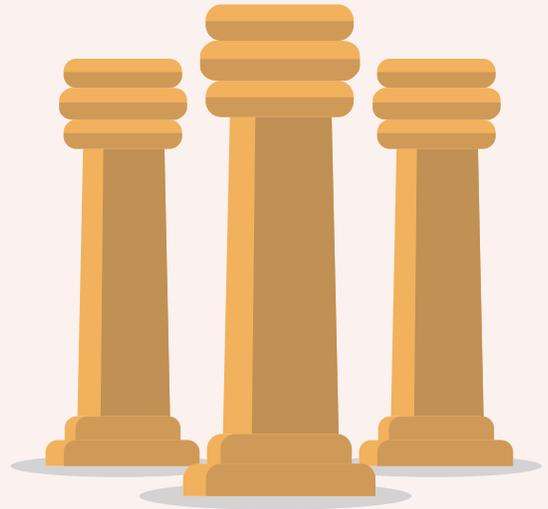
Bettina Specht

Senior Marketing Manager, [Litmus](#)

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The Litmus Methodology to Email Marketing Success

We believe there are three crucial pillars to email marketing success: Optimize your campaigns before the send (Pre), analyze results and use these insights to optimize future sends (Post), and—finally—break down silos and use the power of email to improve the effectiveness of other marketing activities (Perform).



You're never truly alone: the power and growth of the email marketing community

The earliest email marketers had to teach themselves the art and practice of email. In the 2010s, that practical need spurred the creation of vibrant groups like [Litmus' Community](#), the [Email Experience Council](#), or the [#emailgeeks Slack community](#). These and other email groups share a mission to promote best standards and practices for email, often bringing competitors to the same table to work out solutions for everything from back-end coding to C-suite strategy and management.

“Staying engaged not just with the new processes of technologies we use but also being active within the larger email community will be a big part of continuing to be an effective email marketer.”

Email wasn't fine-tuned by just one person. Email marketing as effective communication wasn't led by just one person. Even if you're the only individual responsible for email at your company, there's a world of people that are always willing to share insights and tips to help shine a light on this truly impactful marketing channel.”

Lauren Kremer

Marketing Operations Lead, [ProQuest](#)

LK



What does the future hold?

The Email Tech Stack

Greater access to data as the key to email marketing success

Although data has grown more crucial to marketing planning, development, and message deployment across channels, it often remains locked down in platforms that marketers don't have access to or with no easy ways of requesting it. In this decade we'll finally see things change.

“In MarTech selections the question “What will we do to store the data?” comes up more often. It is in part because of the popularity and hype around CDPs ([Customer Data Platforms](#)) and I love it. Brands need think about their data strategy. Maybe in 10 years the term CDP will be surpassed and we can go straight to “How can I (as a marketer) access the data that we need to do X?”

The days of walking to another department and waiting on them for a simple data query or selection, should be over. I call it [Data Accessibility by Design](#), and it goes in sync with the rise of the Citizen Data Scientist.

So how will the email marketing tech stack change? Direct access to data can increase the number and effectiveness of campaigns. Email software allows you to unlock more data, improve statistical models and offer cross-channel optimization.”

Jordie van Rijn

Email Marketing Consultant & MarTech Watcher, [Email Vendor Selection](#)



In the next decade: Unlocking the data closet will give marketers the freedom to create better emails for their customers and to use email to power problem-solving and opportunities beyond their own departments.

ESP consolidation will give way to more evolutionary changes

The cloud-based marketing suite became the new model of service delivery for digital marketers who wanted to create an omnichannel program that would reach consumers wherever they were on the customer journey (also a concept that flowered in the previous decade). Some ESPs bought start-up firms that created niche technologies missing from the larger platforms. With other consolidations, data companies bought ESPs to bring email marketing in-house.

“Fifteen to 20 years ago, we saw data companies buying ESPs. The ESPs that didn’t get bought turned around and bought data companies. They built big, bulky Death Stars that ended up cross-selling other company services.

Now we’re seeing data companies divest their ESPs. One example is IBM, which bought and rebranded Silverpop, just divested it, and it’s now a stand-alone agency called Acoustic. But we’re also seeing smaller companies acquiring each other, like the acquisitions of Emma and Liveclicker under Campaign Monitor.”

John Caldwell

Founder, [Red Pill Email](#)



In the next decade: Email will continue to be a fertile ground for technological innovation. Expect to see these initiatives springing from nimble start-ups run by far-sighted industry veterans who have both the experience to know what works for email and the vision to put it into practice to tackle growing needs for accessibility, data management, and security. Also, look for acquisitions to bring complementary tech firms together instead of plugging tech holes in a suite of diverse tools.

The best tools will be the ones that embrace the power of seamless integrations

Think about all the different tools you use today to get an email out the door, from copywriting and designing to testing, sending, and analyzing your campaigns. Will the next decade bring out the one magic tool that can cover the entire email workflow?

We don't think it will. Email teams, their requirements, and their workflows are too unique to make a one-size-fits-all solution likely. Instead, we'll see email tools embrace the power of flexibility. Smart technology providers will accept that they can't do it all and instead focus on seamless integrations with the marketing tools their customers already use—for flexible, customizable solutions that fit each team and their unique workflow.

“Best-of-breed will be important, but best-integrated will be key. Brands can't provide a unified customer experience if their systems aren't all working off a single view of the customer across their entire digital marketing and CRM platform.”

Chad S. White

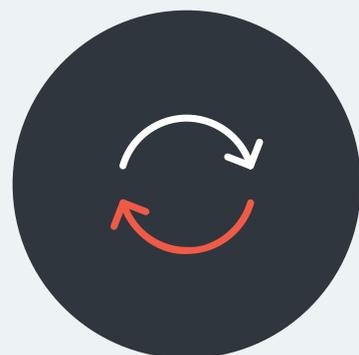
Head of Research, [Oracle CX Marketing Consulting](#) | Author, [Email Marketing Rules](#)



In the next decade: Whether it's an ESP, a campaign management tool, or a platform for email testing and analytics, the amount and quality of integrations a tool offers will become a crucial factor for marketers who build out their email marketing tech stack. Seamless integrations enable a smooth flow of data and power efficient workflows—and that's the secret for email marketing success in 2020 and beyond.

Litmus Works Where You Do

No matter which tools your team uses, we want to make sure that you can utilize Litmus to improve your campaigns. That's why Litmus is designed to work with any email tool, and to fit into your unique workflow.





What does the future hold?

Email Workflows

Teams must master complex email workflows in order stay competitive

Your workflow is where people, tools, and strategy come together. So let's recap some key predictions: In the coming decade we'll see more people involved in email production, expect a demand for a higher volume of more targeted campaigns, and continue to see brands use a diverse set of tools to get their work done. What does that mean for your workflow? It's getting more complex.

“Workflows will only grow more complex. Brands that don't find a way to manage that growing complexity will suffer from overloaded workflows—and risk cuts in productivity and campaign quality.”

Whitney Rudeseal Peet
Digital Marketing Specialist, Litmus



So, how do you get ahead of an overloaded email workflow? Take a close look at every step of your current workflow and see where your team spends the most time. Is it coding and development that's taking the longest? Does your team waste too much time collecting reviews and approvals?

In the next decade: Don't let obsolete workflows turn into painful bottlenecks. Tackle them today to accommodate all the changes your email program needs to stay productive.

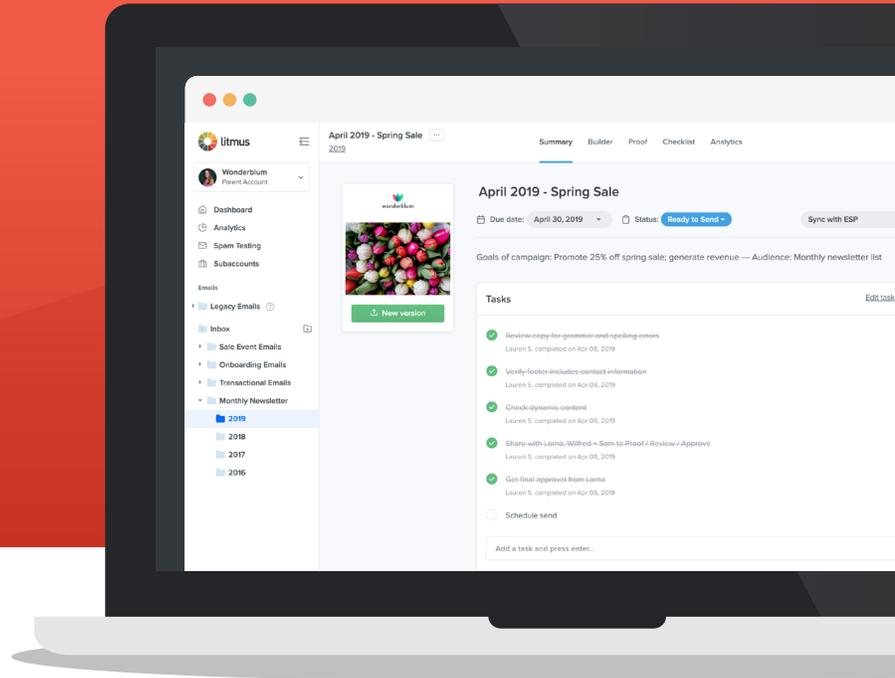
Automation as the key to streamlining workflows

Too often, teams simply accept mundane, repetitive tasks that slow down their team and leave room for errors. They inline CSS by hand. They countlessly copy and paste email code from their email coding tool to their ESP. They test their emails manually. They patiently collect feedback from internal stakeholders across a range of communication tools even though centralizing this process would save time and energy.

If you're looking to set up a workflow that's capable of handling the rising demand for email in 2020 and beyond, you can no longer afford one that's not optimized every step along the way. Brands that do email right find ways to replace manual work wherever possible—and that boosts productivity, leaves less room for errors, and saves time and money.

Streamline every step of your email workflow with Litmus

Litmus makes it easy to build, test, approve, and analyze every email for the best results.



Campaign Development

Simplify organization and processes to accelerate email production, improve quality, and control access. Start new campaigns with a single click and set them up for success in a seamless, unified view; efficiently create, edit, and navigate code in Litmus Builder; and more.

Pre-send Testing

Create the best possible chance to drive results by testing every email with Litmus. Identify and fix critical elements that could hurt performance with Litmus Checklist, reach the inbox with Litmus Spam Testing, and ensure a great subscriber experience with Litmus Email Previews.

Reviews & Collaboration

Reduce confusion and speed up approvals—and production time—by enabling stakeholders to share feedback and approve campaigns in one place. Plus, easily share projects directly from Litmus and get even more visibility with notifications in Slack.

Technology & Integrations

Eliminate manual steps with integrations that let you access Litmus Email Previews directly inside hundreds of popular ESPs. Plus, seamlessly transfer code from Litmus to your ESP with a single click using Litmus ESP Syncing.

Insights & Analytics

Understand subscriber behavior to improve future campaigns in email and across channels. Fine-tune testing efforts and identify your most successful campaigns to inform future segmentation, design, and content decisions.