Adrian Rowe

is the chairman of Red C and of the Institute of Direct Marketing North. An experienced direct and digital marketing consultant advising clients across a range of sectors, he was awarded Honorary Life Fellowship of the IDM in 2001 for exceptional services to the profession. His commitment to eye tracking as a research methodology can be traced back to an extraordinary seminar given by Professor Siegfried Voegelé at the 1985 Montreux Symposium.

Lorenzo Burrridge

is an Eyetracking Analyst and Researcher at Red C. Having completed a Masters in the Psychology of Advertising at the University of Lancaster, Lorenzo joined the agency with a brief to develop all aspects of the eye tracking service that Red C offers to its clients.

Keywords: eye tracking, email marketing, email design, digital marketing, inbox marketing, email engagement

Ten key findings for practitioners

Create enticing opening screens to maximize engagement

Adrian Rowe
Chairman, Red C
Anchorage 1, Anchorage Quay, Salford
Quays Manchester, M50 3YL, UK
Tel: +44 0161 872 1361
Email: arowe@redcmarketing.com

Case Study

Ten inbox secrets: What eye tracking reveals about designing better emails

Adrian Rowe and Lorenzo Burrridge

Received (in revised form): 13th June 2012

Abstract

This paper synthesizes the findings of a research project using eye tracking technology to study the effectiveness of email designs across a variety of market sectors and demographics, with the objective of identifying common techniques that could be applied to improve engagement and performance. The study covered 50 emails across eight different sectors, from fashion and holidays to daily deals and Christmas gifts. Eye movement data was collected and analysed from over 100 subjects, all of whom were pre-qualified to ensure data validity. A fuller version of the document, with many more examples of email heatmaps and gazeplots, can be downloaded from the Red C website. The paper is written to be of prime interest to email practitioners and designers.

Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice (2012) **14**, 46–65.
doi:10.1057/dddmp.2012.23

Introduction

When we first conceived the idea of conducting a series of studies on emails by sector, we felt that it could prove a rich source of insight. Our organization already had significant expertise in the area from writing, designing, building and analysing emails for clients. We knew a lot about *what* worked — we wanted to know more about *why* it worked. Nine months on, with more than 50 emails studied among over 100 participants, this paper represents a distillation of some of the most important findings into ten key areas. We wanted it to be useful for email marketing practitioners, and we have structured it for those at the sharp end, illustrating each point with examples we uncovered of both good and bad practice. It has given us some outstanding insights into the techniques that encourage recipients to engage with and respond to emails, and we hope you will find it useful in designing more effectively for the inbox.

First impressions

We read emails one screen at a time — each new screen determines whether we continue to scroll or hit delete. So the opening ‘screenful’

is highly influential on the overall email performance. Direct mail letters work one sentence at a time, and a good copywriter knows that the reader's propensity to read the second sentence is based on the persuasive power of the first sentence. The principle is exactly the same for email. Sustaining attention in an email has its own 'engagement funnel', and the battle for a recipient's continued consideration starts at the very first screen.

A store environment provides a good analogy. If the subject header was the window poster that persuaded us through the doors, consider that the opening screenful is that first step through the doors, when we orient ourselves and search for the visual cues to draw us into the store environment. Finding helpful, relevant visual cues in the first screen of an email is just as important as in a store, perhaps even more so — you can't delete a store at the touch of a button!

Remember that recipients who open your email have many differing reasons for doing so. You must ensure that you cater for all of them to maximize your engagement funnel. In particular, bear in mind the different needs of 'purposeful' openers against those who are 'just dropping in'. Purposeful openers may head straight for the navigation to help them access the most relevant part of your website, or they may read what you have to say first. Make sure your navigation is clear in the opening screen. Openers who just drop in are in browsing mode — perhaps they like your brand or they're in the market for your products, but you're not the only option. The best-performing emails in our studies maximized clicks by accommodating both. Freemans do this well in their Style Bible email (Figure 1) by giving readers extra 'short-cuts' to sub-categories of womenswear (for those already in buying mode), but also making immediate eye contact and opening a conversation about a latest fashion trend with compelling, personalized copy (for browsers).

We found that engagement, and preference, was influenced significantly by the time spent viewing the email. In turn, time spent was influenced primarily by the success of the email opening screen in drawing readers through the second and third screens. It's vital to provide plenty of good content in the opening screen to maximize success, especially in the form of irregular shapes, compelling information and graphic offer elements. One fatal error in many of the least preferred and least successful emails from our studies was the use of a big image on the opening screen. It may be tempting to aim for the 'wow factor', but in the market sectors we studied, including fashion and holidays, opening on a big image left subjects searching in vain for visual cues. Consistently, the most engaging emails worked hard in the opening screen to provide reasons to read on or click through in equal measure.

So the first secret of email success is to make a good first impression. Just like when your prospective customers first enter the store, you have to help them orientate — find their bearings — and skilfully steer them in the right direction. It represents the first step in the email engagement funnel.

Go wild this July with animal prints, vintage glamour and holiday must haves

You've subscribed to our emails: [unsubscribe here](#). If you can't read this email please [click here](#)

To ensure Freemans emails always go into your inbox, simply add agv@marketing.freemans.com to your address book or contacts list.

freemans.com

My Account

Log in

Quick Order

Help

Save For Later

View shopping bag

Women	Lingerie	Men	Kids	Sports & Leisure	Electricals	House & Garden	Gifts	Sale	Money
Tops	Dresses	Trousers	Coats & Jackets	Jeans	Skirts	Footwear	Jewellery		

STYLE BIBLE

Let's go
WILD

Dear Mr White,

Do you dare to wear the wildest trend of the season? Animals are absolutely everywhere this season and it's a look that'll carry you all the way into Autumn – we love it! Take a look below and you'll find a few of our favourite pieces.

Also this month, we go back in time to the structured styles of the 50s and 60s. If you've seen the TV show, Mad Men, you'll know what we're talking about. We'll be showing you how to work the Madison Avenue look into your wardrobe.

And finally, if you're going on holiday, look out for our guide to the perfect holiday capsule wardrobe to suit every budget.

Enjoy!

Helel
x

Style Bible Editor

TAKE A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE ▶

ZOOM
£8

SEE MORE

CALL OF THE WILD ▶

Figure 1: An effective opening screenful from Freemans using eye contact to create engagement

Use design structure to maintain scrolling momentum

Email anatomy

Whether your email is a lengthy newsletter or a digital postcard, the underlying design structure is crucial in determining levels of subconscious engagement. We have observed a difference in email practice between UK and US marketers in recent years. US email programmes tend to favour high-frequency, single-minded emails — digital postcards — while the UK has generally evolved lower-frequency emails with richer content — digital newsletters.

Both strategies have their merits, but design and structure play a bigger role in sustaining engagement in richer-content emails, where converting browsing into purchase intent is more important.

One of the most commonly observed design techniques emerging from our studies was the use of diagonal structures among most successful emails in terms of engagement and preference. The email from multi-channel retailer Next (Figure 2) provides a masterclass in design technique, maximizing the engagement funnel by making good use of eye contact, with angled images supported by well-written fashion copy and connected by cut-out shots of the ideal shoes to accompany the dress. The aggregated heatmap shows clearly how our subjects followed the visual cues on a pathway down the email.

Excessive use of linear templates and rectangular panels creates subconscious barriers to engagement, and were a common factor in many of the least successful emails we studied. It's not a hard and fast rule though — we found some very effective email designs that overcame a linear structure and maintained engagement using other techniques, or combined linear and non-linear sections to create changes of pace within the email.

Use navigation to drive purposeful clicks

Digital signposting

Good navigation can account for over one-third of total clicks on a well-designed email. What's more, we know from actual data on a number of email programmes that navigation clicks are more 'purposeful', with a higher propensity to convert. Best practice often advocates mirroring the navigation on your website within emails, but this is most certainly a poor piece of advice, and doesn't account for the very different objectives of website and email. Most commercial websites have the key objective of closing the sale — maximizing the conversion to sale or desired action — visit the store, book the restaurant or sign up for the course. In contrast, email programmes have objectives much further up the sales funnel — creating purchase consideration, launching a new product, announcing a sale, or simply maintaining engagement and share of mind.

So good practice for email navigation is to accommodate the reasons for opening and support the themes and content of the email in the digital signposts. If your email is all about fashion, consider including secondary navigation for fashion sub-ranges. If your subject header announces a sale, give openers the choice of going straight there with a prominent button and clear taxonomy — 'Shop the Sale' — or browsing the email to find out what's in the sale. For recipients, email navigation offers the promise of a short-cut to exactly where they want to be on your website — the more relevant the signposts, the better your chances of a click. Don't be bound by your website navigation — consider the most effective digital signposts on an email-by-email basis.

One important technique for improving visibility of — and propensity to click — navigation buttons is to avoid isolating your

Your summer guide to being the best dressed guest – [Shop Dresses](#)

next Shop Summer Collections
[Women](#) | [Men](#) | [Girls](#) | [Boys](#) | [Home](#)

[Text-only version](#) | Add mailto:please_do_not_reply_to_this_address to your safe list

the BEST DRESSED GUEST

Summer occasions

[Shop Occasion Dresses >](#)
[Shop Lace Dresses >](#)
[Shop Prom Dresses >](#)
[Shop all Dresses >](#)

SUMMER WEDDING

This Mink Sequin Pleat Dress is understated and elegant with a perfectly judged hint of glam in the details.

sparkle sandals catch the eye without stealing the Bride's thunder.

E75

E42

Figure 2: Terrific design structure from Next, using product cut-outs to draw the reader down

email navigation bar from other elements. This happened most commonly in our tests with emails that made the mistake of opening with a big image. Where this occurred, navigation bars often became separated from the higher-attention elements of the email, and were missed altogether. On a website page, visitors are attuned to the conventions and seek out navigation in familiar places — in an email, behaviour is quite different, as readers seek visual cues to establish what is on offer and whether it is of interest.

Another good strategy to increase incremental response from navigation is to include extra or repeated navigation, especially at the foot of emails. Most engaged readers will read to the foot of an email and, if persuaded by the content, consider visiting the website, so it makes sense to include extra or alternative digital signposts here. If your product ranges or services are deep, try using additional sub-navigation in relevant positions within the email. All can prove productive in capturing incremental purposeful web visits.

The middle section of a content-rich email from Jessops (Figure 3) makes good use of extra navigation within the email at *the point of consideration*, promoting three different types of camera with a lead offer, and then providing useful extra navigation allowing readers to shop by brand. Jessops know that many camera enthusiasts are intensely brand loyal, and cater for this with good short-cuts to their favourite brand.

Finally, many good email marketers understand the value of using colour and icons in email navigation to draw attention to important signposts. Contrasting colours for important navigation elements, such as the use of red for the Sale link, or simple icons that improve absorption and understanding of the routes to the website, can be very effective in directing attention and capturing extra response.

Use multiple, well-designed calls to action

Clickability

Successful salespeople know that even the most skilfully crafted sales pitch is wasted unless they ‘ask for the business’. In every sales conversation, inertia is the worst enemy — it’s vital to close the sale quickly — but face to face, the salesperson can tailor the conversation to the prospect’s interest. In a digital environment, we don’t have the same advantage. The most successful emails close the sale effectively by featuring strong calls to action at every point of consideration.

Clear winners in our test studies were those emails that featured multiple calls to action throughout the email, well positioned to be in close proximity to the featured product or service. Longer emails took less than 60 seconds on average to be fully digested by subjects in our tests — shorter, digital postcard formats engaged attention for around 10 seconds. So decisions to click, or not to click, are made in milliseconds. What’s more, while a High Street store can be revisited in a shopping trip, an email almost always has just one opportunity to stimulate the desire to purchase before it’s deleted. So it is vital to

Figure 3: Camera retailer Jessops understands that many of their customers are loyal to a particular brand, and gives them short-cuts to their favourite

exploit the immediate vicinity of the product or offer by providing a well-worded call to action there and then.

The 'Go to Deal' button that features prominently on Frugaloo's daily deal email (Figure 4) is located in close proximity to the details of the deal and directly adjacent to the price and savings panels, which we found to be very high-interest elements, as the heatmap shows. The format of Frugaloo's call to action also demonstrates another of our consistent findings, which is that conventions for button design are well understood by viewers of emails and websites, and successful emails exploit this. Good email marketing is about making it easy and removing obstacles to the sale in a digital environment where actions

Figure 4: Frugaloo's daily deal email makes economic use of space to attract attention and positions a prominent call to action in close proximity to each deal

are taken — open, click, delete — in very compressed timescales. Make clickable elements look clickable!

Frugaloo also demonstrates another key success factor for enhancing clickability. Good use of colour and language. Each button is consistently positioned and uses a strong lime green that is absent from the surroundings, giving it prominence even in peripheral vision. Moreover, the language ‘Go to Deal’ is clear and unequivocal, with a strong sense of underlying urgency well suited to a deal-based proposition.

We have found the language of Call to Action (CTAs) to be a decisive factor in many of our tests. Recipients do not want to be perplexed or intrigued, but they may not be quite ready to buy what is on offer. Many ecommerce brands use language that reflects the stage in the purchase funnel that the reader has reached — ‘View the range’ or ‘Find out more’ may prove more clickable than ‘Buy now’ for just this reason.

When considering call-to-action devices, the key implications from our study are about improving clickability. Proximity, colour, font, language, design and shape all play an important part in influencing recognition and propensity to respond.

Content kings

Added-value content increases emotional engagement

It’s often argued that websites without good, original content are more likely to fail — ‘content is king’. And while emails do not have to compete for search engine rankings, good content is just as important, because they have to compete for attention in crowded inboxes. Email programmes that focus single-mindedly on selling may do well, but they are missing out on incremental business by failing to emotionally engage with recipients. In our tests, emails that included ‘added-value’ elements — content not directly relating to the sale but valued by the reader — often scored highly for attention and preference.

The prime objective of any email programme is to maximize digital footfall — closing the sale is a task for the website — and the best eCRM programmes exploit this synergistic partnership. All things being equal, people buy from people they like, and the right added-value content in an email can prove invaluable in creating a positive environment for the sale process. We found a number of examples amongst our study emails of content that did not directly sell, but was successful in attracting high levels of attention and increasing the propensity to visit the website.

Arcadia brands (see Figure 5) frequently use this technique in their emails to draw attention to their fashion ranges, offering advice and inspiration in a sector where both are much appreciated. Miss Selfridge includes a ‘behind the scenes’ video preview of the new season’s fashion in the email shown here, which was cited as a reason for preference by some of our respondents. Another Arcadia email, this time from Top Shop, offers an online virtual makeover tool that promises to help shoppers master the art of ‘Disco Glam’ make-up,

Figure 5: Miss Selfridge and Top Shop both use video content effectively to drive extra clicks and enhance engagement

accompanied by a video tutorial. While clearly demonstrating how well these brands understand the motivations of their target audience, such content also enhances brand engagement and increases the likelihood of a sale. Both also use the ‘triangle’ convention, which consumers readily recognize. We have seen this act as a very powerful call to action in our studies.

Added-value content not only acts to increase engagement with an email, but also has a big impact on preference and positive associations, influencing propensity to open future emails from that brand and potentially reducing unsubscribe rates. An email programme that consists purely of the latest offers is only likely to be opened and studied when the consumer is in purchase mode. A programme that provides a richer and more varied diet of content, including advice,

humour, video elements or access to helpful online tools such as the one from Top Shop, helps to build a sustainable and engaged audience, and creates incremental digital footfall.

Sustain reader attention with integrated copy soundbytes

Words that paint 1,000 pictures

The most engaging emails in our tests invariably combined copy and images effectively to attract and sustain attention. We are attracted by the images of products, just as we scan the shelves in shops to find something appealing, but we gain confidence and make purchasing decisions from the supporting information, perhaps on the price tag or the label. *'How much is it, and is it in my price range? How does this product compare with other similar models I've seen elsewhere?'* We have already set out our assertion that, in the main, it is difficult to complete the sale in the email alone — but we can enhance the likelihood of a sale by what we do in the email. We can send people through to the website with their wallets and purses out, if we use copy effectively.

There are two important factors that make for effective copy in an email — what you say and where you say it. This Christmas-themed email from Marks & Spencer (M&S; Figure 6) proved effective in terms of copy engagement, integrating easily absorbed snippets of copy into the overall design alongside high-interest cut-out product shots. The design structure makes good use of text, graphics and imagery to maintain the reader's momentum while imparting persuasive sales messages quickly and efficiently. As we have already noted, there is real 'click synergy' in integrating imagery, text, graphics and pricing information in close proximity, and the M&S email is an excellent example with high-preference scores in our study.

Another very effective copy technique is the use of hypertext links within blocks of copy — the convention is well understood by consumers, and is often treated as a potential 'deep-linked' short-cut, acting as an additional call to action. Substantial blocks of copy should be avoided wherever possible, as they can act as barriers to further readership. If lengthy copy is needed to explain a complex offer, devices such as hyperlinks, wrapping text around supporting images and using columns to shorten line length all help to sustain reader attention.

Direct marketers are expert in the use of copy devices to tell a story, and one classic technique that we saw work well in our study was the use of a bullet point list. This is the kind of good supporting information that helps to build confidence and create the environment for a sale.

Optimize product presentation to close the sale

Digital salesmanship

In print and in online communication, just as in the physical world, there's a real skill in salesmanship, but we have to use other communication techniques to make up for the limited range of sensory elements at our disposal. In a digital environment, the

Figure 6: Good integration of text with very high-interest cut-out product shots in this Marks & Spencer Christmas email

messages we display, the context in which we display them and how we exploit peripheral vision are the skills most needed to close the sale.

Among more than 50 emails in our test studies, a very small number seemed to exhibit something special in terms of engaging subjects in a particular product — the ability to sustain positive subject attention for an unusual length of time in the ‘soundbyte’ environment of email. In the same way that a charismatic salesperson or market trader can command attention from a crowd, these emails presented products in a

manner that created sustained attention and strong recall — we termed this effect ‘digital salesmanship’.

Of all the examples we studied, by far the most finely crafted was this Bank Holiday Sale email from camera retailer Jacobs (Figure 7), which featured an Olympus Pen camera at a reduced price of £299 as the leading offer. According to our camera enthusiast subjects, this was a high-interest product, one of a new generation of compact system cameras incorporating many of the features of higher-end cameras — such as interchangeable lenses — but at a more affordable price point. So it was not surprising that the product attracted sustained attention and had strong recall, but this product panel — which accounted for only 15 per cent of the area of the email — commanded over half of all the time spent viewing the email by our respondents. Studying the gazeplots of our individual subjects, we observed a synergy of attention between the product image, the price point and savings starburst, and the product copy details.

There is an elegant efficiency about the design of the product panel. The use of cut-out shots for the camera and the lens helps integrate the feature into the Bank Holiday Sale message above and the alternative, higher-priced bundle deal below, and gives a three-dimensional feel to the panel. The Save £80 starburst graphic neatly connects the product image with the body copy. The use of a head-and-shoulders shot in the viewfinder is a clever device — throughout our studies we found subjects inexorably drawn to make direct eye contact with facial imagery.

Several other emails in our study demonstrated elements of digital salesmanship, and what characterized all of the high-attention product panels was the use of cut-out product shots — whether fashion, cameras or Christmas gifts — soundbytes of product copy, strong headlines, subheads and price points, often with attention-grabbing graphics employed to link and integrate the elements. Every effective product offer we observed exploited the positioning of elements to maintain continuous engagement within the reader’s peripheral vision. In maintaining eye contact like the successful salesperson, each of these emails used a combination of persuasive techniques to ensure the best chance of closing the sale.

Graphic devices can overcome inertia and create momentum

Graphic assets

In all kinds of marketing communications, good designers know how to exploit graphic devices to draw attention to important messages and dramatize key offers. Graphic devices can convey urgency or exclusivity, shout a special offer or whisper a subconscious brand attribute. For emails, where the timescales for consumer engagement and interaction are brief, graphics can be especially effective in visually conveying a hierarchy of messages and influencing the path taken through the email.

Once again, Top Shop (Figure 8) provides a good example of the use of graphic devices to draw attention to offers — in this case Free

DIGITAL PHOTO & VIDEO

www.jacobsdigital.co.uk

Now accepting

DIGITAL SLR | DIGITAL COMPACTS | DIGITAL MEMORY | LENSES | TRIPODS | BAGS | OPTICS | VIDEO

DIGITAL PHOTO & VIDEO

OFFERS VALID UNTIL TUESDAY 3RD MAY

BANK HOLIDAY SALE!

SAVE £80!

OLYMPUS
PEN E-PL1 BLACK + 14-42mm LENS

Itching to take professional pictures but intimidated by SLRs? Then look no further than the Olympus E-PL1. This camera has it all: high quality, point-and-shoot simplicity, and chic PEN design.

WAS £379.99, NOW **£299.99**

OR FOR MAXIMUM VERSATILITY CHOOSE THE TWIN LENS KIT:

OLYMPUS
PEN E-PL1 BLACK + 14-42MM + 40-150MM

WAS £549.99, NOW **£449.99**

SAVE £100!

FUJIFILM
FINEPIX S1800

Fujifilm's 18x superzoom is ideal for those who are looking for much more flexibility and zoom range than a compact can offer, but who don't want the expense and bulk of a DSLR system.

WAS £259.98, NOW **£99.99**

BETTER THAN HALF PRICE!

SAVE OVER £159!

SAVE £15!

Canon
POWERSHOT A800 BLACK

You can rely on Canon know-how to take great 10 Megapixel photos with Smart Auto mode. The PowerShot A800 has a lightweight design that is fun and easy to use.

WAS £79.99, NOW **£64.99**

Canon IXUS PROTECTIVE SOCK FREE! WITH ALL IXUS COMPACT CAMERAS

WORTH £9.99!

SAVE

Figure 7: Superb design integration of product shots, copy, price points and graphics to create a high-interest and well-liked opening screen

Figure 8: Top Shop draws attention to the offer and products and sustains momentum using colourful graphic devices

Next Day Delivery in a roundel, positioned just above the navigation — and to provide a subliminal route down the email using three headers — Maxi Style, Midi Length and Pencil Perfect — deliberately positioned on a diagonal slope. The aggregated heatmap of our recipients' viewing patterns shows clearly how effectively these messages were absorbed while increasing the attention to the products.

Another Arcadia fashion email, this time from Dorothy Perkins (Figure 9), makes novel use of a 'notebook and pen' graphic to support a set of New Year's fashion resolutions, each resolution attached to relevant products. The angled presentation of the notebook and the diagonal sight line of the pen are both important small touches in influencing eye movement in the direction that the designer intends — drawing attention to the product.

Figure 9: Dorothy Perkins uses a New Year's resolution notebook and pen to draw attention to their latest fashion products

In all these emails, graphics are used purposefully to showcase the product, to direct attention, to 'connect' elements within the email and to create pathways, often helping to overcome the limitations of a linear underlying design structure. It is impossible for us to know what was in the minds of the designers, but in each case they have clearly demonstrated an instinctive grasp of the techniques to influence readership and aid absorption in a content-rich context.

Exploit every email pixel to advantage

No stone unturned

In a store, every square foot represents the opportunity for a sale. In an email, every pixel should be exploited to gain an extra click or increase the likelihood of conversion. What's more, unless you are Louis Vuitton or Mulberry, where spacious ambience lends exclusivity,

the more products you offer and the more benefits you can showcase the better. For every thousand readers who open your email, there are a hundred different reasons for doing so. The more you can cater for — within a well-designed, balanced structure, of course — the better your response rate.

Some of the most successful emails among those we studied frequently contained more than 30 clickable links — product links, offer links, hypertext links, multiple calls to action, secondary and tertiary navigation. For the reader, the clear implication was that they were being offered a great deal of choice. From a customer's perspective, presenting options is empowering — and of course, as we have observed elsewhere, it demonstrates classic sales psychology, not so much *'do you want to buy or not?'* as *'which do you prefer, the red or the blue?'*

Freemans recognizes the dilemma that older women face in choosing a swimsuit to suit their shape in the email illustrated here (Figure 10) and offers a video for each shape, such as Apple, Pear and Hourglass, which proved of high interest to our test subjects. They make optimum use of the email space — angling the shots to provide pathways, dramatizing the key benefit within the copy soundbyte, and providing a small but helpful shape illustration near the 'Watch video' call to action. This hard-working email space incorporates several of the techniques we have described in this paper, including the use of 'Zoom' as an additional call to action on the product image, rather than 'Buy' or 'View More'.

As a general rule, emails that allowed too much space between 'points of interest' gained little engagement from our test subjects, and as a consequence were rarely positively recalled. Almost without exception, the emails best received in our tests left no stone unturned in attempting to engage and sustain interest and exploit every opportunity for incremental responses.

Exploit adjacencies to reinforce positive perceptions

Peripheral vision

We interpret what we see differently depending on the context and environment. What might seem an exceptional bargain in a department store would be perceived very differently in a discount store. In emails, the use of elements in peripheral vision, and imagery especially, can reinforce positive perceptions and aid understanding. Throughout this paper we have discussed the importance of positioning and integration for a marketing channel that is like no other in its dependence on scrolling to sustain attention. For email design to be successful, it is vital to factor in near and peripheral vision.

This Christmas gift email from Debenhams (Figure 11) illustrates the principle very effectively. By positioning a secondary set of navigation buttons between a discount graphic and the irresistible subliminal attraction of eye contact, the email measurably increases the likelihood of noticing, and acting on, the buttons. The diagonally structured 'Big Gift Event' headline can still be assimilated in

Figure 10: Freemans makes optimal use of the space around featured product videos with multiple calls to action

peripheral vision at this point. The email continues to use eye contact to attract, and discount offers to substantiate, throughout the email, maintaining reader momentum, as can be clearly seen from the heatmap.

Many of the most effective emails we tested employed the technique of ensuring that the 'attractor' (most often an image or graphic) was in close proximity to the 'substantiator' (typically copy

Figure 11: Debenhams uses peripheral vision effectively to maintain reader momentum

on product benefits, prices or savings), together with one or more calls to action. The daily deal sector emails in our study all used this approach effectively to present multiple ‘deals’ in a standardized format that was easy for our subjects to absorb rapidly — important for a high-frequency email programme — and made it easy for them to determine which were of interest.

Peripheral vision is an important influence on eye movement and direction, and can be a decisive factor in encouraging email recipients to maintain engagement — to keep scrolling. Considered placement of

all the elements in the email design structure can significantly increase attention throughout the engagement funnel.

Conclusion

Email design is not a science — success requires creative flair, good customer knowledge and, of course, great products — but the insights from our study reveal some powerful techniques that can be employed to tease out extra clicks and conversions. From creating good first impressions with opening ‘screenfuls’ to maintaining momentum and engagement using graphic assets and digital salesmanship, we uncovered dozens of examples of effective practices that transcend market sector and customer demographics. Email is an exciting and flexible channel that yields a wealth of measurable data. Testing is simple and very fast to implement. And like all digital media, email is constantly evolving — as email marketers, it’s vital that we continue to hone our digital design practices.