

EPSILON®

CLICK. SWIPE. TAP. WATCH.

Everything you need to know
about interactive email in 2020



You've got mail!

Anyone who was around for AOL's heyday remembers how exciting that announcement was. But the email of today hardly resembles the email we eagerly awaited in the 90s. The novelty has worn off. The expectation of personalization has evolved—and we're not just talking about adding a first name or company name into the body copy.

Pioneering email marketers are using a variety of interactive methods to make their messages personal, engaging and fun. Kinetic techniques, agile content and even AMP experiences are starting to make our inboxes feel more like websites.

And people are responding positively.

[Martech Advisor](#) reports that “interactive email content **increases the click-to-open rate by 73%** and adding videos to your email content can boost click rates up to 300%.”

According to [DemandGen](#), **91% of B2B buyers prefer to consume interactive and visual content.**

[Kapost](#) says that **interactive content generates 2X more conversions** than passive content.

Epsilon's client messaging data supports these findings. They've been common knowledge for years—but it turns out few marketers actually use interactive email to engage their customers.

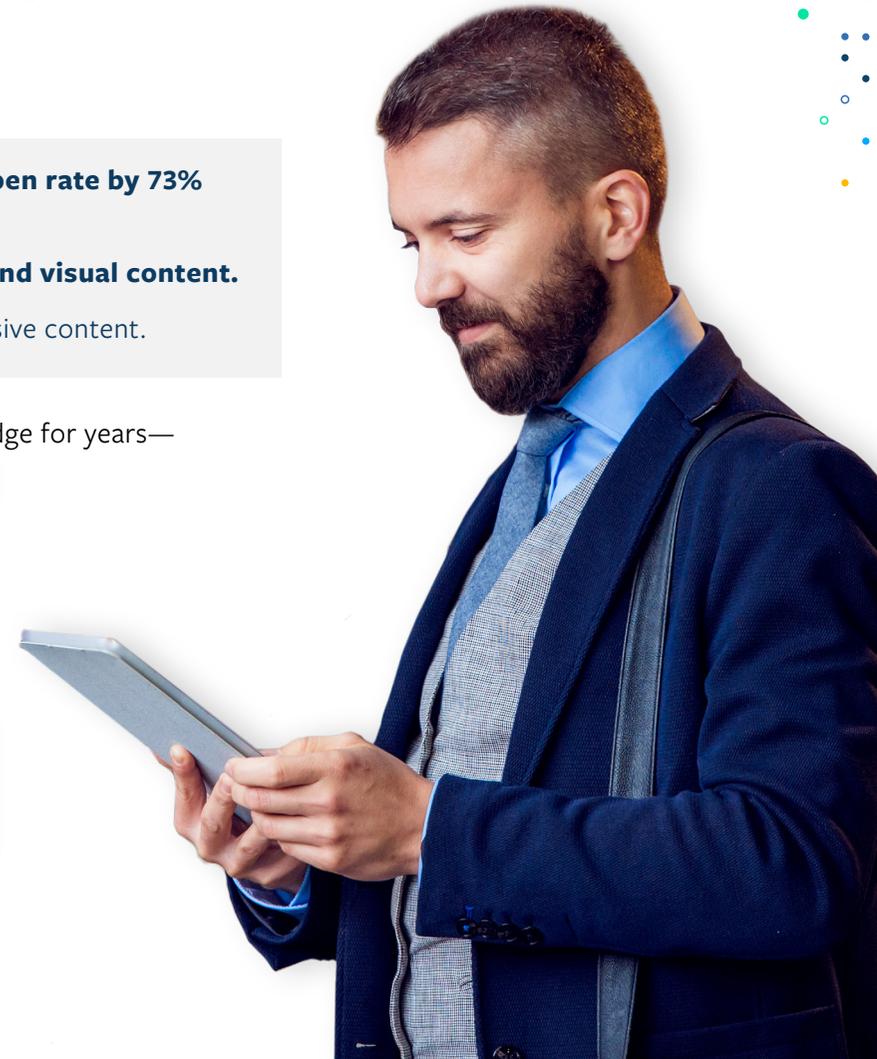
This guide will share insights and expertise to help you:

- Understand common types of interactive email
- Recognize the challenges and overcome the intimidation factor associated with interactive email content
- Dive into performance metrics and best-in-class examples
- Plan actionable steps to get started with interactive content
- Begin to achieve one-to-one personalization at scale

Ready to bring excitement back to email? Let's dive in.

91%

of B2B buyers prefer to consume interactive and visual content.



Interactive email—what is it?

With lots of terms flying around the marketplace, let’s start with a little level setting. What, exactly, is interactive content in email? There are a few key terms to be aware of:



Interactive



Kinetic



Agile

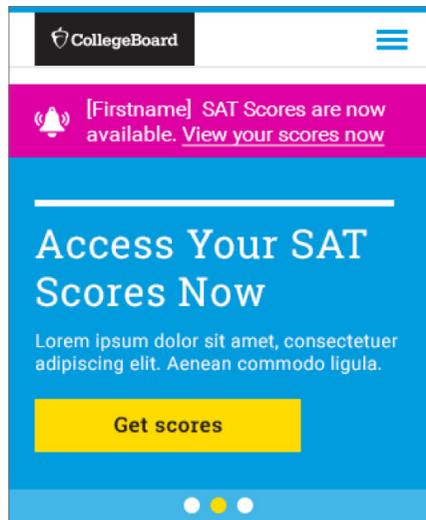


AMP

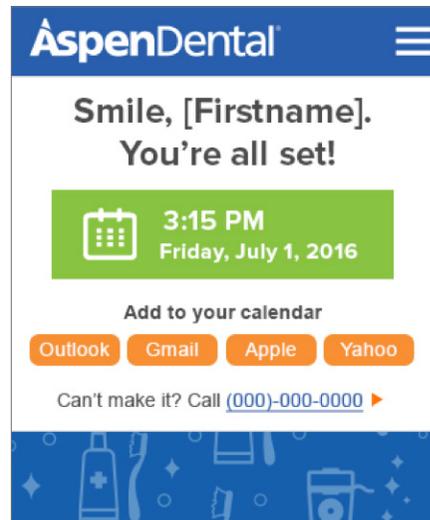
Interactive email experiences

Interactive content in email is anything your customer can tap, click on, swipe or interact with. It includes quizzes, assessments, shopping carts, hot spots, carousels and videos. It also includes “hamburger” menus in mobile navigation. Emails may contain just one interactive component or many, but this does have an impact on the weight and delivery of the message. “Interactive email” is often used as an umbrella term for many types of email innovations.

Drop-down menus



Interactive emails can include hamburger menus that allow recipients to navigate through email content like they would on a mobile app or website.



Image/button rollovers

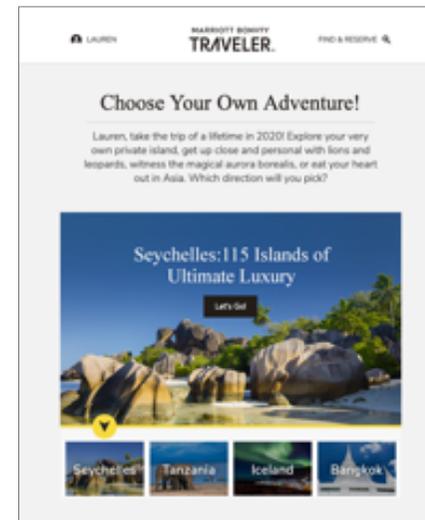
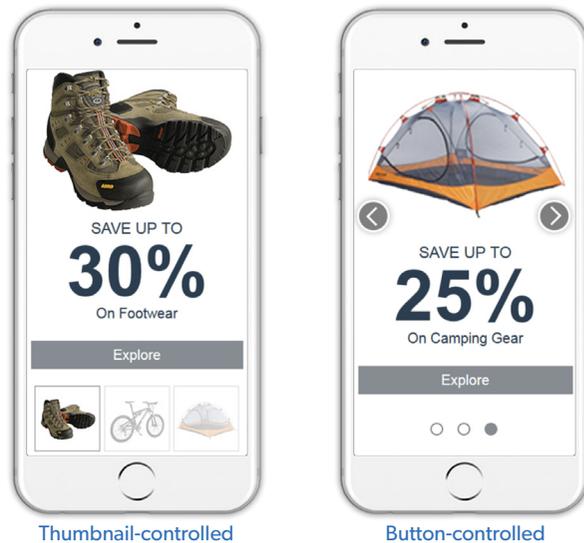


Image and button rollovers add an extra fun element to email design. They’re also a great way to help your subscribers navigate and interact with your email.

Kinetic email experiences

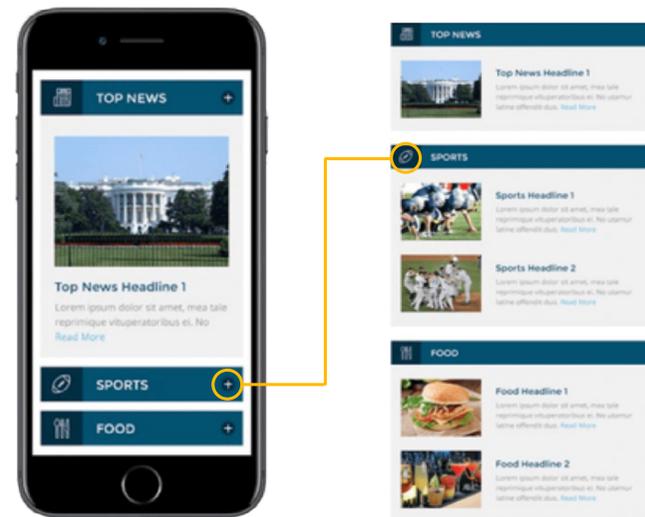
Introduced in 2010, kinetic email takes it a step further, using CSS transitions and animations that respond to user actions. While an interactive email may contain just one or two interactive components, a kinetic email uses a templated design that brings together several components for a fully interactive email. Users can interact with most—if not all—of the components in the email. As the technology has become more widely adopted, the terms “interactive email” and “kinetic email” are now often used interchangeably.

Carousels



Carousels are a good example of kinetic functionality. They improve the user experience by putting the recipient in control of the content. Carousels also allow for a cleaner, more concise layout for presenting multiple products or images—especially on mobile, where this is widely supported.

Progressive disclosures



Progressive disclosures are also possible in kinetic emails, revealing more content when a recipient clicks or taps.

Agile email experiences

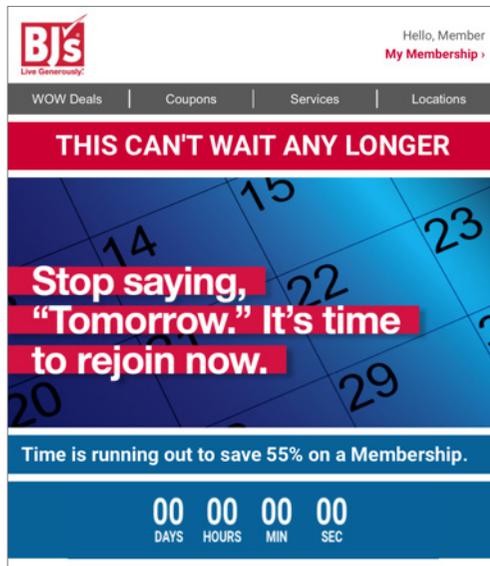
According to [Econsultancy](#), agile email is a sub-category of interactive email in which a brand creates or curates content the moment a user opens or re-opens an email—not before send, or at send (with automated or dynamic content). This means a marketer can change the content of the email depending on opening factors like time of day, location and current weather in that particular area. Emails can also display live sports scores and inventory levels, or host live polls and quizzes.



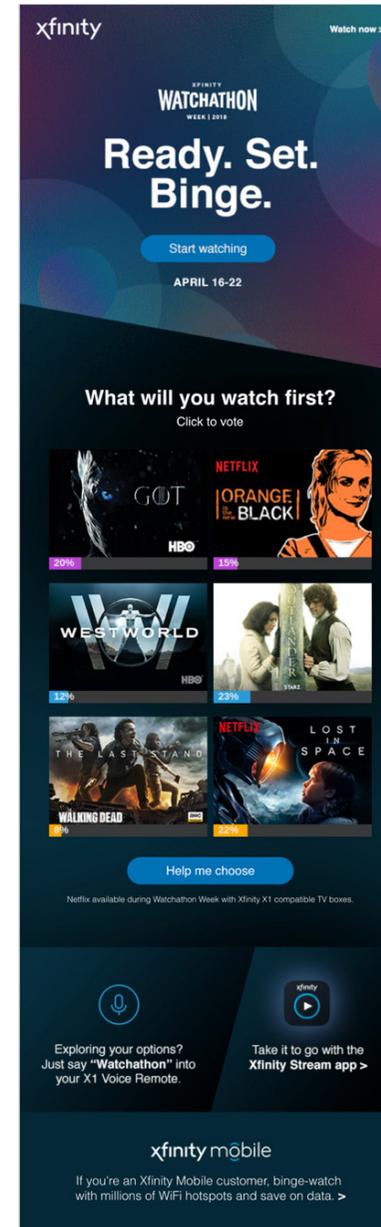
Live time-of-open content can increase email engagement by as much as

40%

Countdown timers



Countdown timers are a type of agile email experience. They update every time a recipient opens the email, to increase the sense of urgency.



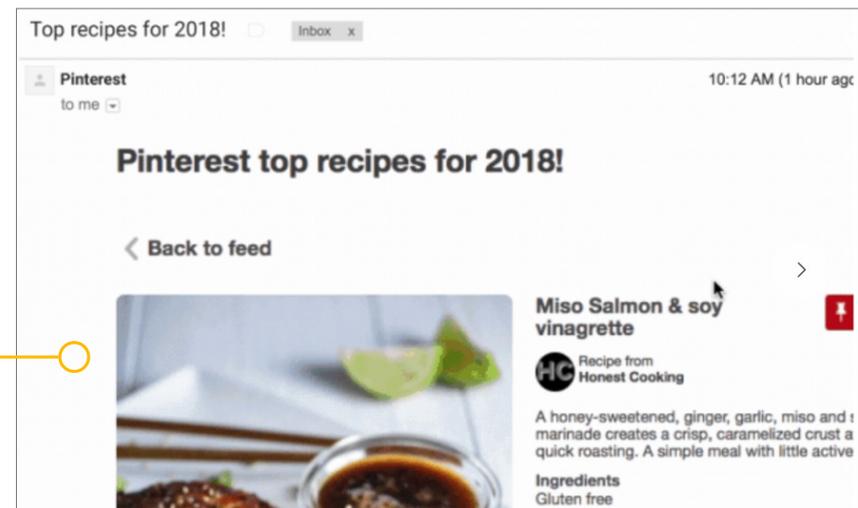
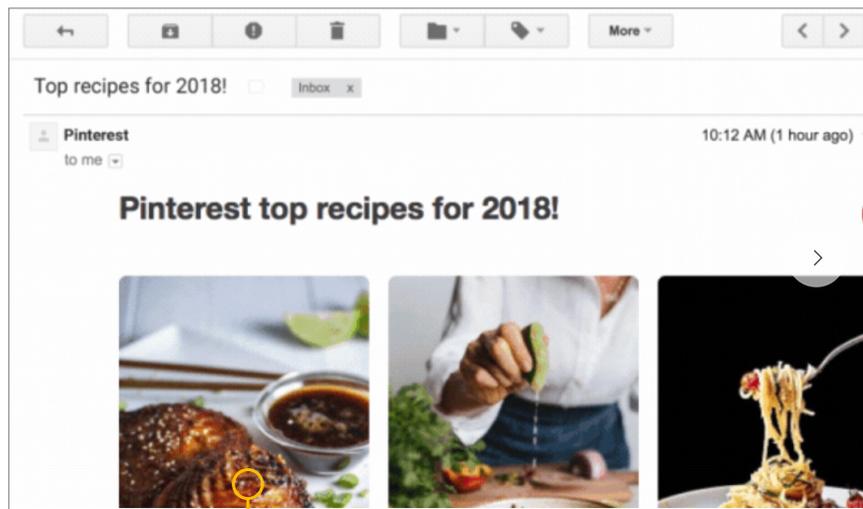
With agile email content, live poll results can update each time a recipient opens the email.

AMP experiences

Standing for “accelerated mobile pages,” AMP is a technology introduced by Google that makes it possible to embed dynamic and interactive elements in emails, such as carousels, accordions and purchase buttons. Marketers can even use AMP components to allow recipients to RSVP to an event, browse a catalog or respond to a comment within the email. Think of AMP as technology that enables interactive content, rather than content itself.

Google’s goal with AMP was to speed up the mobile web experience and make emails “more useful and interactive in Gmail.” Recently, Verizon Media introduced support for AMP in their efforts to create a better customer experience. But today, AMP support is mostly limited to certain versions of Gmail.

In this example of an AMP experience, the recipient is able to browse top Pinterest recipes, click deeper for details and even pin recipes to their own boards—directly from the email body.



Why does interactive email perform so well?

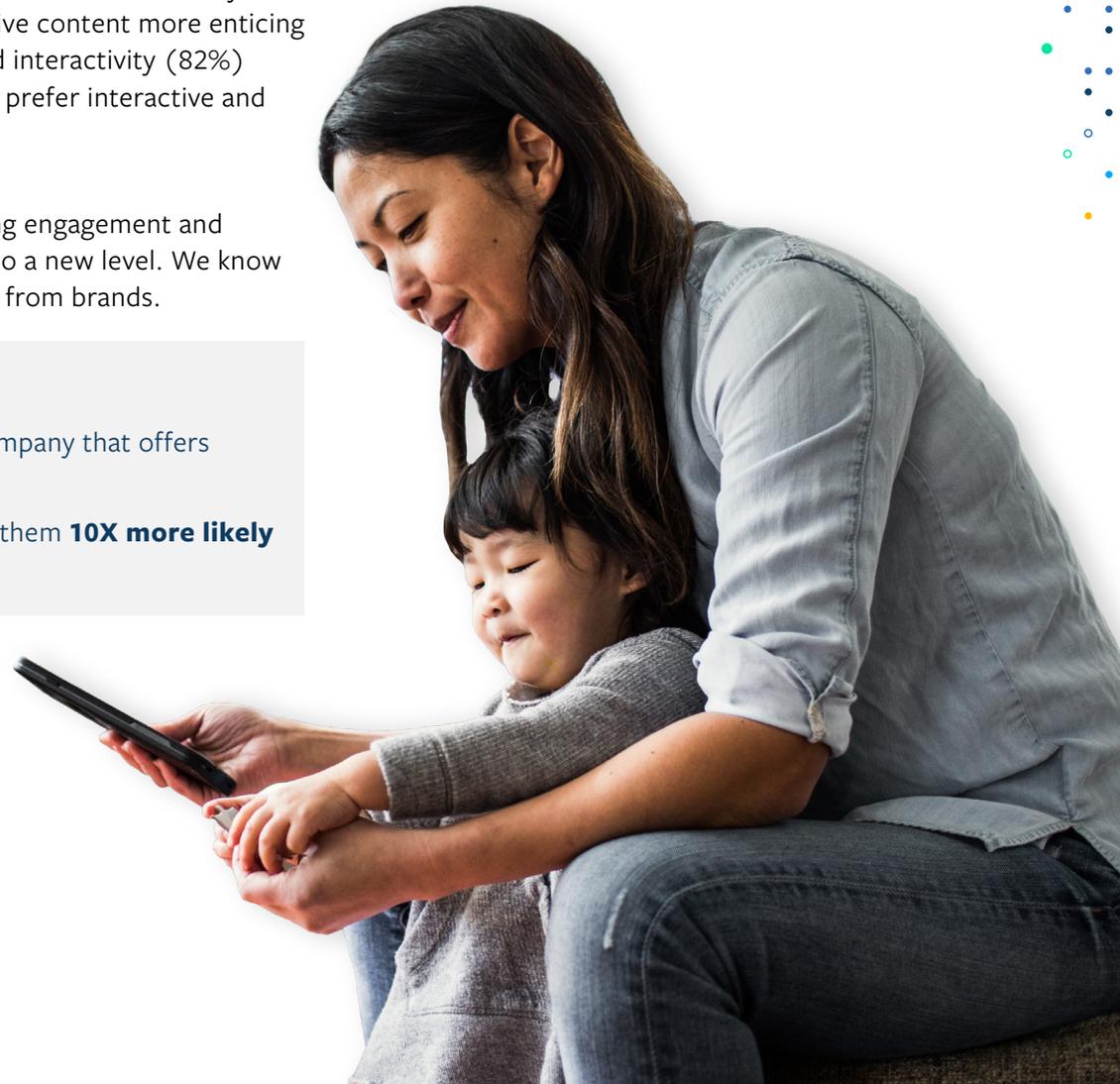
As mentioned, emails with various types of interactive components can improve click-to-open rates by up to 300% and generate 2X more conversions than passive content. A survey from [Campaign Monitor](#) discovered that respondents find interactive content more enticing than images and videos. They prefer GIFs (69%), video (65%) and interactivity (82%) over traditional static emails. And just about all B2B buyers (91%) prefer interactive and visual content.

Interactive content performs well against static content—improving engagement and conversions—because it helps brands take their email experience to a new level. We know many consumers expect a highly relevant, personalized experience from brands.

[Epsilon research](#) shows that:

- **80% of consumers** are more likely to do business with a company that offers personalized experiences.
- **90% of consumers** find personalization appealing—making them **10X more likely** to be your most valuable customer.

Using interactivity within emails helps brands to deliver on the mandate of personalized, engaging experiences.

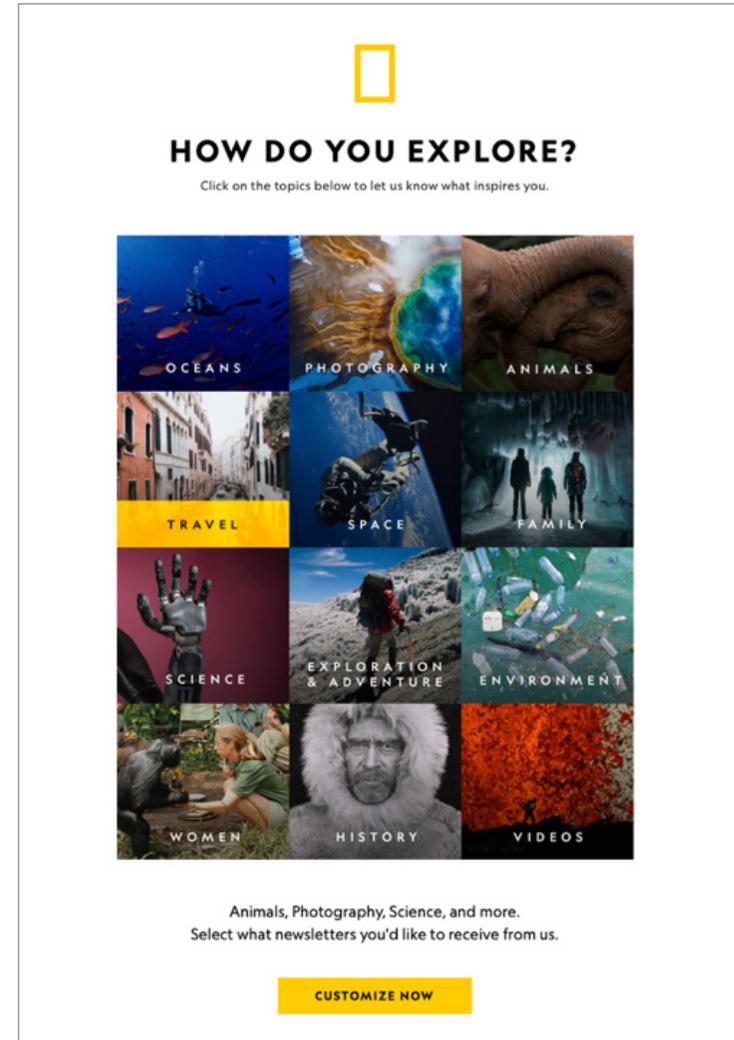


Who's using interactive email design now?

The Epsilon PeopleCloud Messaging team keeps an eye out for examples of inspiring email interactivity.

Lauren Gannon, VP of Creative at Epsilon, highlighted this email in **National Geographic's welcome series**. With compelling imagery featuring image rollovers, the email allowed recipients to customize future newsletter communications by choosing their favorite topics. Each image box also drove to the associated section of nationalgeographic.com.

"I'm always drawn to unique and compelling visuals," says Lauren. "This email reinvented the traditional preference center, offering a beautiful and engaging experience."



Epsilon's Senior Product Marketing Manager, Grace Kotvis, chose this **Cinemark** email as an inspiring example of interactivity, as it has a movie trailer that can be viewed right in the inbox. Embedding video in email is commonly known to improve engagement.

"I like how Cinemark uses video to boost the impact of this exclusive offer," explains Grace. "Even mentioning the word 'video' in the subject line of a message can significantly increase open rates."

Despite its outstanding performance in the inbox, surprisingly few marketers are using interactive emails in their own marketing. Litmus surveyed nearly 2,000 email marketers about their team's use of interactive email design and found:

- o A full 77% of marketers have not tried interactive email yet.
- o Nearly half (45%) of respondents haven't tried interactive email—and they don't plan to any time soon.
- o Only 23% of marketers say they've used interactive elements in their emails.

With few brands choosing to go interactive with their emails, the playing field is wide open for innovative brands like

The screenshot shows an email from Cinemark. At the top, it says "Claim your tickets now!" and lists Cinemark's partners: Century Theatres, AMC, and Regal. The main headline is "MEMBER EXCLUSIVE COMPLIMENTARY SCREENING". Below this is a large movie poster for "THE PEANUT BUTTER FALCON" featuring Shia LaBeouf, Dakota Johnson, John Hawkes, and Zack Gottsagen. The poster includes critical acclaim: "THE SWEETEST DARN FILM OF THE DECADE," "FANTASTIC - FULL OF HEART AND PACKED WITH HUMOR," "A MODERN-DAY MARK TWAIN FABLE THAT WILL MELT YOUR HEART," "A FUNNY, HEARTWARMING ADVENTURE," and "A GENUINE DELIGHT." The poster also mentions it is a "WINNER" of the "CRITICS' CHOICE AWARDS". A play button icon is overlaid on the poster. To the right of the poster is a smaller image of a boat on water with a play button icon. Below the poster, there is a paragraph of text: "A modern Mark Twain style adventure story, THE PEANUT BUTTER FALCON tells the story of Zak, a young man with Down syndrome, who runs away from a residential nursing home to follow his dream of attending the professional wrestling school of his idol, The Salt Water Redneck. A strange turn of events pairs him on the road with Tyler, a small time outlaw on the run, who becomes Zak's unlikely coach and ally. Together they wind through deltas, elude capture, drink whisky, find God, catch fish, and convince Eleanor, a kind nursing home employee charged with Zak's return, to join them on their journey." Below this text is a small URL: "https://cinemark.com/0000016/4848780264/36348467-4". At the bottom of the email, it says "BE THE FIRST TO SEE THE PEANUT BUTTER FALCON WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 14 | 7:30 PM" and a red button that says "CLAIM TICKETS". On the right side of the email, there is a section titled "SCREENING EXCLUSIVE OFFERS" with the following items: "\$5.00 LARGE POPCORN WITH FREE REFILL**", "\$4.00 LARGE FOUNTAIN OR FROZEN DRINK WITH FREE REFILL**", "\$2.00 REGULAR HOT DOGS", and "\$1.00 OFF PEANUT BUTTER M&M'S". At the bottom right, there is a footer: "You are receiving this email because you registered as... If you don't want to receive these emails in the future, you can unsubscribe from Special Offerings emails. This email was sent by Cinemark USA, Inc. 3900 Dallas Parkway, Suite 500 • Plano, TX 75093 USA. We respect your right to privacy. View our privacy policy." The Cinemark logo is at the bottom right.

What are the challenges?

One of the factors keeping email marketers from diving into interactive is that they're intimidated by the prospect of its execution. There are challenges to consider when creating interactive campaigns:

- Interactivity isn't supported by all email inboxes and inbox providers.** For example, while Apple/iOS supports almost all experiences, Outlook, Yahoo, Gmail and AOL have limited support. Outlook will degrade a carousel to an animation or even a static experience. That means it's critical to design a fallback experience.
- Coding interactive emails isn't easy.** It requires increased investment in development and QA hours.
- Measurement can be tricky.** Because email interaction is frequently measured by click activity, it can be difficult to measure interactions in the inbox. If the action isn't an actual click on a hyperlink, some activity can be difficult to ascertain.
- Accessibility can be complicated.** Interactive emails that aren't designed and developed correctly can lead to accessibility issues for screen readers and assisted devices.

While these issues may feel daunting, they're not insurmountable. With the right knowledge, tools and partners, nearly any brand can successfully implement more interactive and engaging email.

Interactive support by email client/app: Illustrative QA chart

Every interactive element has varying degrees of support, often dependent on complexity. For example, Samsung Mail supports interactive tabs but not search bars or carousels. Epsilon tests for every interactive element by email client, and then documents them in charts like the one below for interactive tabs. We list when static fallbacks replace the interactivity.

Email Client/App	Interactive tabs
February 2020	
Samsung Mail (Android)	Yes
iOS 13	Yes
Gmail App - Android	Fallback
Gmail App - iPhone	Fallback
Outlook App - Android	Fallback
Outlook App - iPhone	Fallback
Yahoo App - Android	Fallback
Yahoo App - iPhone	No
BlueMail - Android	Yes
BlueMail - iPhone	Yes
Boxer - Android	Yes
Boxer - iPhone	Yes
Apple Mail	Yes
Outlook 2016 (Mac)	Yes
Outlook 2013 (PC)	Fallback
Outlook 2016 (PC)	Fallback
Outlook 2019 (PC)	Fallback
Outlook 2019 (Mac)	Yes
Gmail	Fallback
Yahoo	No
Outlook.com	Fallback

Building an interactive email campaign—tips for starting out

To get your interactive email program off on the right foot, it must be built on a solid foundation. Here are some recommendations to consider as you get started:

1

Be selective and start small

Not every email needs to be interactive. Assess your goals and KPIs, then consider which campaigns could benefit most from testing interactive email elements. Where would it enhance the message or make the content more personalized, timely and relevant? Which efforts lend themselves to common interactive elements like quizzes, videos and carousels? And do you have the content to support interactive content in these areas? Narrow your focus before you begin.

2

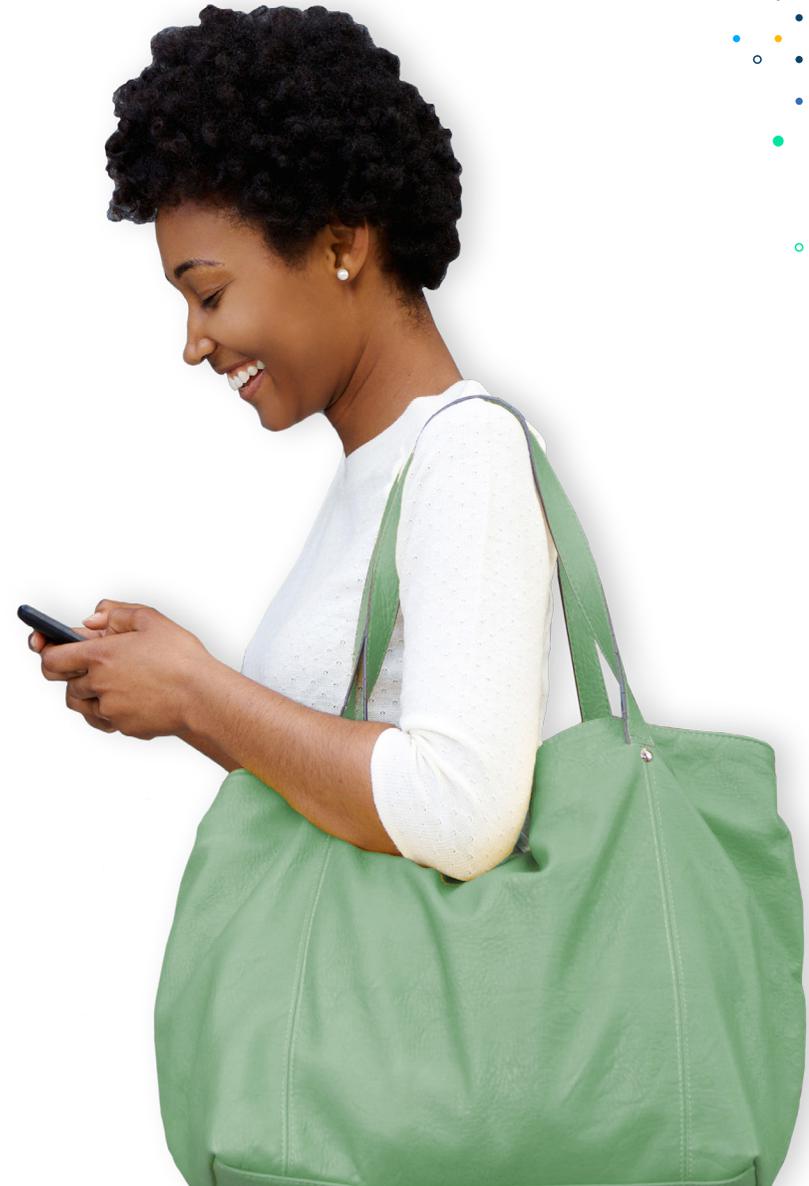
Weigh your interactive email support against your subscriber base

You need to understand your audiences' device usage to determine which interactive elements will be most widely supported—and which may be best for you to test out. Don't forget to design a fallback experience for customers with devices or email clients that don't support your interactive components.

3

Think scalability

Consider creating interactive modules and components that you can reuse, such as a hamburger menu in your global header. This approach creates efficiency and scalability as you test its efficacy against customer interactions.



4

Collaborate with design and development

Start the conversation early with your design and development teams. Interactive emails require more development and QA time—so make sure you build that time into your campaign schedule.

5

Develop a testing plan

While Litmus is great for testing content rendering, make sure you're testing and validating interactive experiences on different devices and operating systems.

6

Become open-time-centric to take your email to the next level

Once you've mastered some of the interactive email basics, consider advancing to more agile experiences to further engage your audience. Elements that change based on time of open are a good place to start, as they increase relevance and allow you to easily personalize the message at scale, every time it's opened.

An experienced email partner can help you build an easy-access library of agile content widgets that will simplify your production process, such as:



Countdown timer



Web scrape



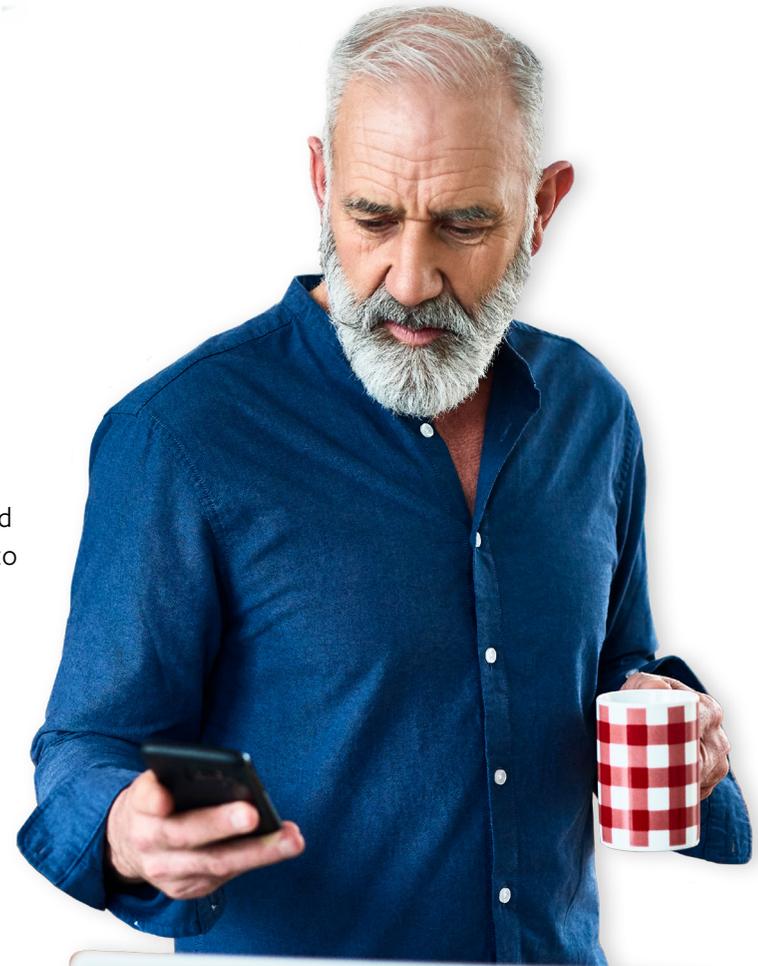
Live poll



Video



Live scores



Interactive email in action

Building an interactive email program might seem daunting, and it does require some investment up front. But if you're considering implementing one, there's no shortage of success stories that illustrate its possibilities and quantify its positive performance.



One Epsilon client—a **major automaker**—included a live countdown timer during their annual holiday event, increasing their unique click rate by 86% over the prior year (with no timer).



By partnering with Epsilon, a **leading retailer of toy and baby products** developed a live web scrape of their website's promotions carousel to improve the relevance of their welcome trigger email. This led to a double-digit lift in click-through rate, click-to-open rate and conversion rate for the retailer.

Let's take a look at some examples of interactive email worth emulating: a popular restaurant and wine bar brand, payment company PayPal and AutoZone.



A restaurant quizzes its customers to drive visits

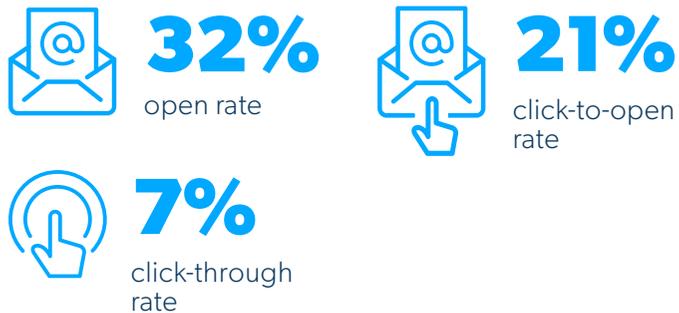
This casual dining restaurant and wine bar client provides a perfect example of interactive email at work. They wanted to increase reservations by growing awareness of their new summer menu and cocktails. The problem was that their standard approach to email only allowed them to feature one new food or beverage item. They wanted to display multiple dishes and drinks to appeal to a variety of palates—and do it in an innovative, subscriber-centric way.

An interactive email quiz fit the bill.

Epsilon helped the client create an engaging quiz with in-house, proprietary coding to accommodate a significant amount of unique brand content. Challenging recipients to “...see if you’re ready to Rosé All Day All Summer,” the quiz piqued interest in items such as a popular brand of rosé wine and refreshing flavored vodka cocktails.

As readers responded to each quiz question, new content populated to tell them if they were correct, and buttons appeared to advance them to the next question. For mobile viewers, all this engagement took place right within the email itself.

This interactive email generated high engagement with consumers, helping the restaurant to build subscriber affinity. The brand enjoyed:



The email quiz also generated great word of mouth across the parent company’s group of brands, resulting in a variety of additional quizzes for other new menus.



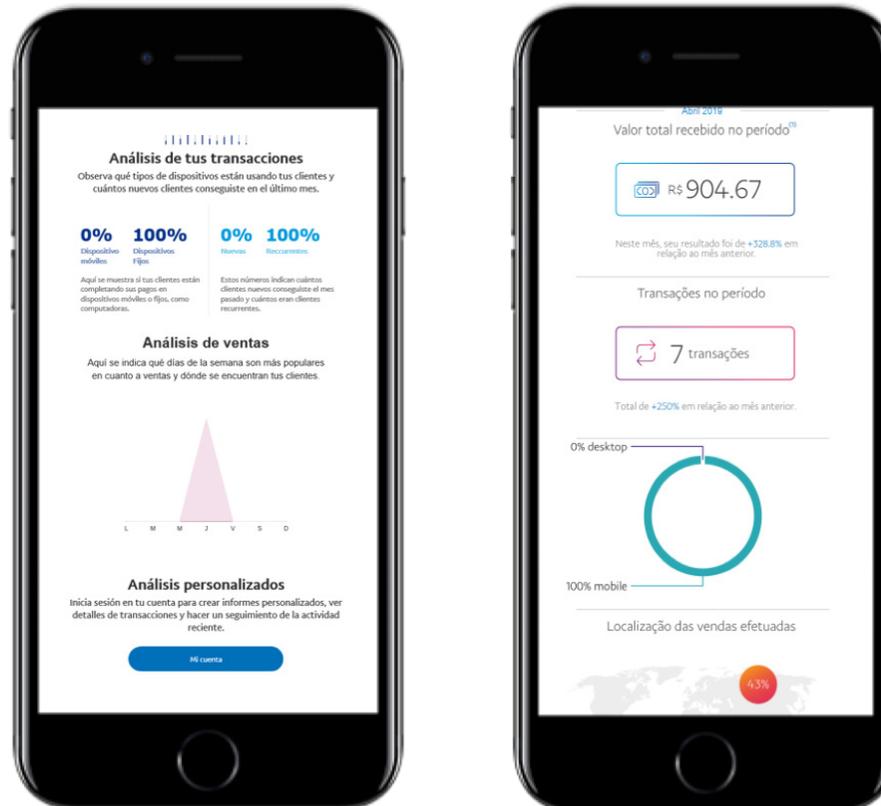
PayPal finesses their visual experience and speeds time-to-market visits

PayPal is always looking for opportunities to elevate their email creative and enhance personalization. By using agile content in their monthly merchant reports email program, they were able to create a unique and interactive user experience. With various types of agile charts and dynamic scripting to display customer data in real time, the updated email creative cuts through the clutter and provides pertinent, digestible and visually engaging reports.

Campaigns that functionally take advantage of the agile content consistently see high engagement rates.

Also, the adoption of agile content led to some considerable build efficiencies—once user data is refreshed, the template automatically pulls the latest unique variables at the consumer level.

PayPal agile content



AutoZone adds value with weather-specific advice

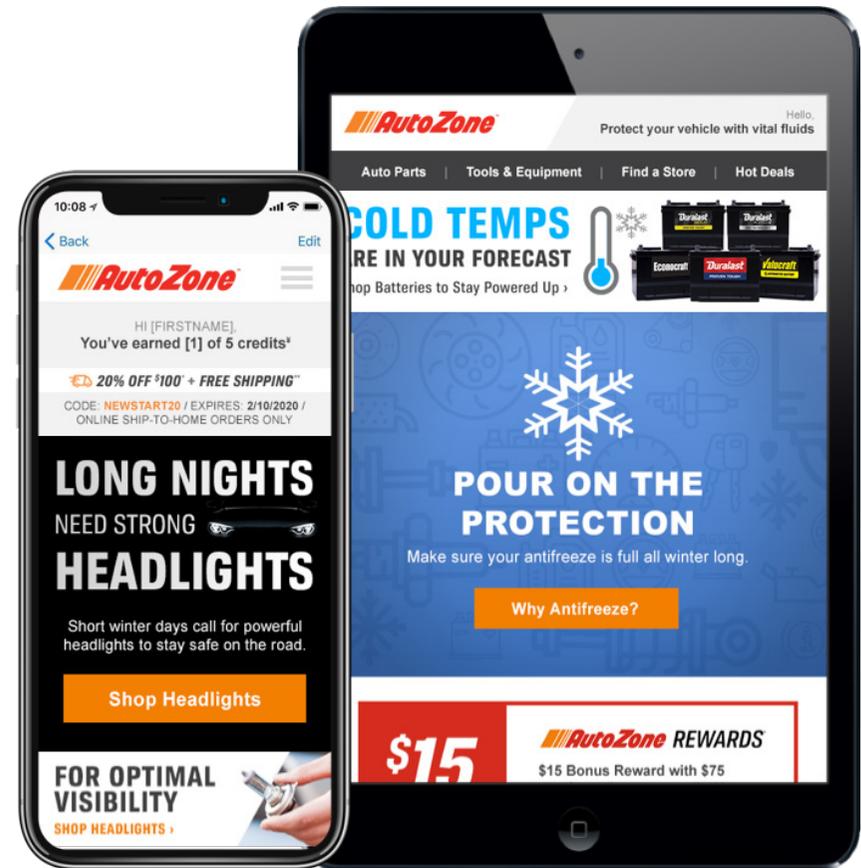
AutoZone is committed to providing the best parts, prices and customer service in the automotive aftermarket industry. Since going the “extra mile” is a part of their culture, they wanted to deliver content via email that was not just personalized—but also delivered helpful advice at the right time.

Weather conditions are an important factor in safe driving, so AutoZone decided to provide customers with email content relevant to their location and weather upon opening. Experiencing extreme cold or heat? You might get advice and product information about batteries. Withstanding a storm? AutoZone may offer you content on wipers. Dead of winter in your area? You might need some headlights—and AutoZone would serve them up in your email.

This agile content was possible thanks to modular creative that could be easily turned on or off if a customer was in an area where the weather event occurred.

The weather-based content added an unexpected level of personalization, reinforced AutoZone’s commitment to delivering helpful advice and was easily scalable across their email marketing roadmap.

Best of all, it far outperformed AutoZone’s static email content.



Conclusion

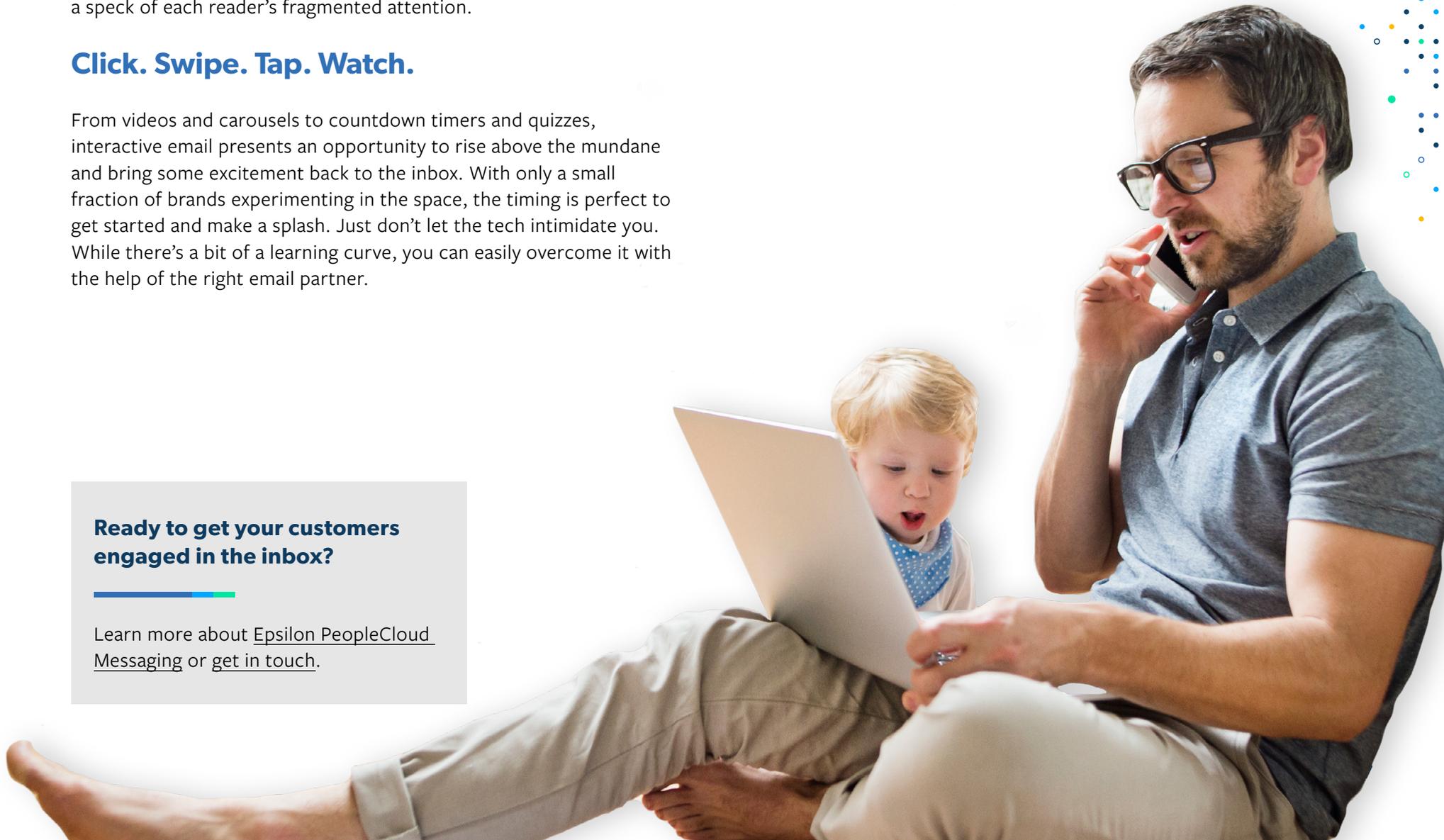
Email used to be exciting. Now everyone's inbox is crowded with promotions. It's a chore to weed through it all. Brands are jostling for a speck of each reader's fragmented attention.

Click. Swipe. Tap. Watch.

From videos and carousels to countdown timers and quizzes, interactive email presents an opportunity to rise above the mundane and bring some excitement back to the inbox. With only a small fraction of brands experimenting in the space, the timing is perfect to get started and make a splash. Just don't let the tech intimidate you. While there's a bit of a learning curve, you can easily overcome it with the help of the right email partner.

Ready to get your customers engaged in the inbox?

Learn more about [Epsilon PeopleCloud Messaging](#) or [get in touch](#).





About us

At Epsilon, we empower brands to transform ordinary customer experiences into meaningful, human experiences. Our connected suite of products and services combine industry-leading identity management technology, deep data science and proven brand intelligence gained over five decades. Using human-powered, data-led marketing, we deliver depth, breadth and scale that helps brands turn meaningful human interactions into real business outcomes.

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