HOW TO MAKE PROFESSIONAL EMAIL SIGNATURES THAT WORK

exclaimer™

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is about best practice.

Visually, technically, professionally – this guide should make the reader ready to create email signatures that work in every sense of the word.

Firstly, appropriate use will be considered in the Tactical chapter. Sedate, simple branding is suitable in some contexts, just as bold, impactful branding is optimal in others – this paper will describe when, why and for whom.

Secondly, aesthetic forms will be discussed in the Visual chapter. This paper will review graphics and styles that work poorly in every context, others that are incongruous under certain circumstances and others that achieve their desired effects, and how they do so.

Thirdly, technical composition will be analyzed in the Technical chapter. HTML coding, email formatting and Outlook limitations will be examined to help clarify their resultant requirements for signature design.

The best use of this guide would be to design and build a new signature while reading it: forming signature ideas in the first section, crafting its appearance in the second and constructing it in the third.

But experienced readers struggling with a particular area may benefit equally by focusing on the sections specific to their query – though novices and experts alike can find new information in every category.

> Create email signatures that work, in every sense of the word

> The best use would be to design and build a signature while reading

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Introduction

This paper explains the best ways to create email signatures – from crafting an impressive image to constructing solid code and even developing the tactical intent behind them.

It's composed of three brief chapters, each with three sections:
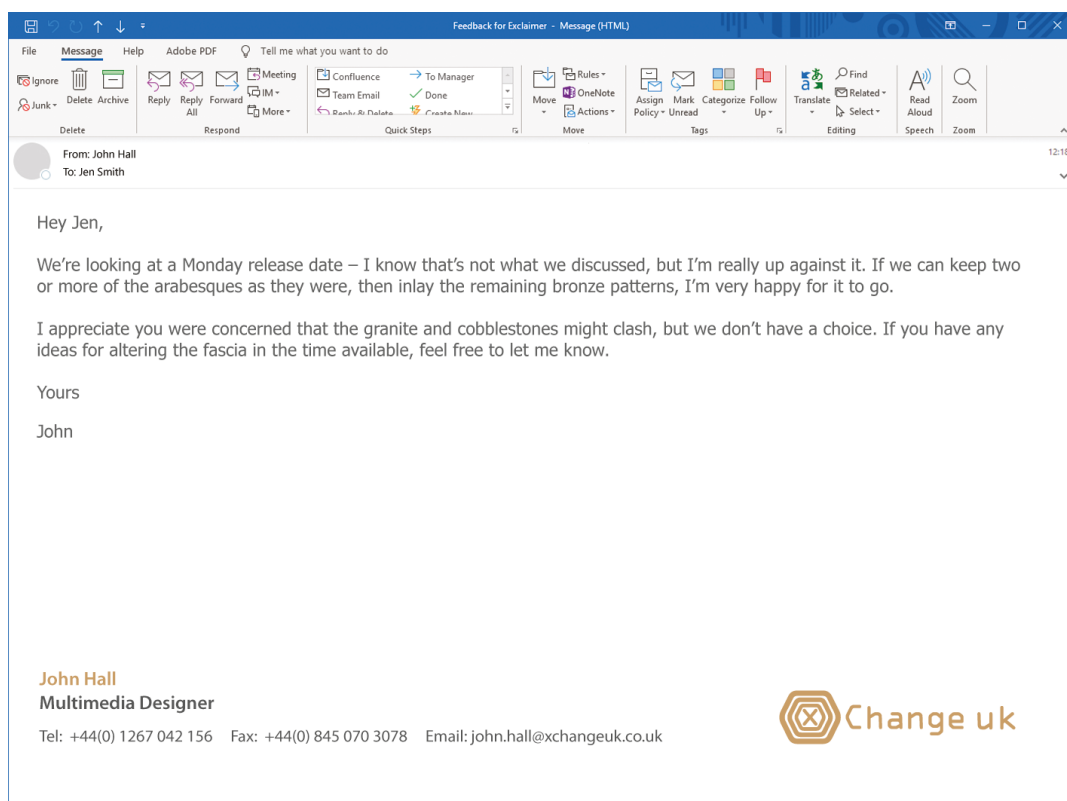
'Tactical' will describe how to think about signatures. The signature creation in the following chapters will expand from the forethought this chapter teaches.

'Visual' will help designers create a signature. It specifies good colors and sizes, as well as savvy ways to integrate all the elements into seamless branding.

'Technical' pushes further into the technical aspects of signature creation and control, the limitations of email clients and sharp ways to work around them.

A 'Final Summary' will summarize the advice in this white paper, and offer partisan suggestions for signature best practice, irrespective of context and environment.

This is how to make email signatures work – in multiple senses of the word. Make them work commercially, make them work visually – make them work for you.

TACTICAL

The three sections in this chapter relate to the purposeful aspects of signature creation – before design and construction comes requirement.

A signature that works well for one company may work badly for another, and a signature that works well for a company at one time, may work badly at another.
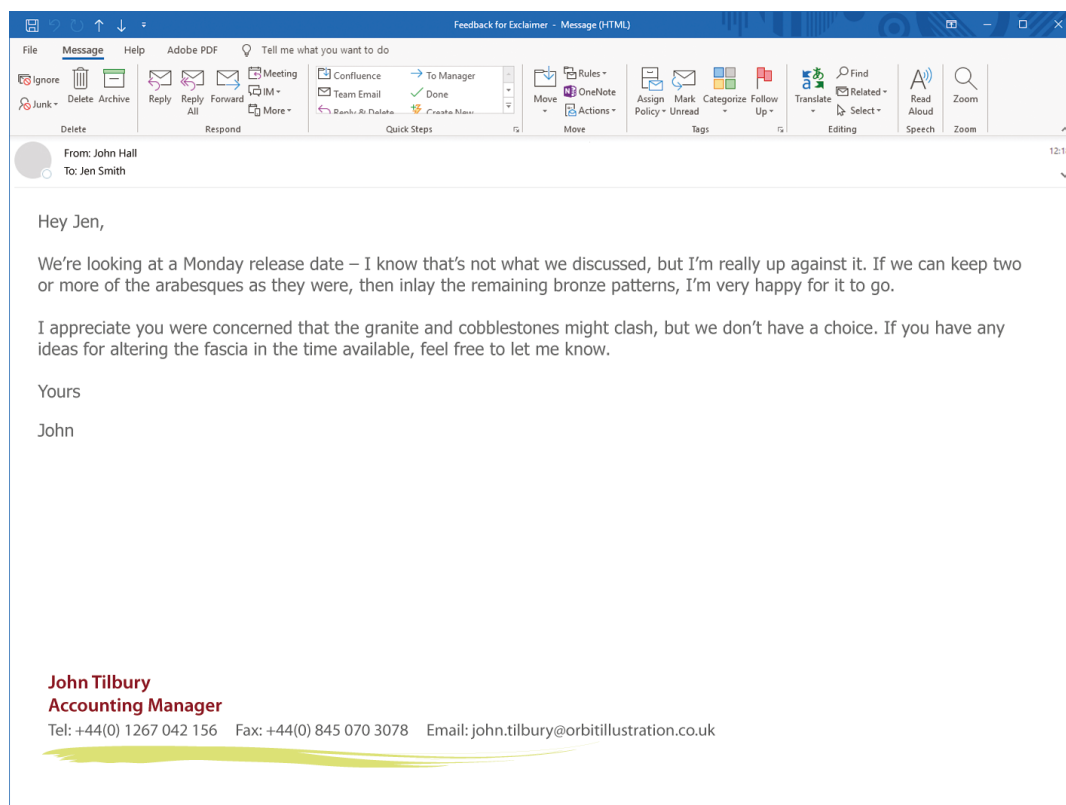
In '**Composition**' we examine the pieces that make up a signature: image, information and links.

In '**Density**' we examine when strong, imposing signatures should be used and when simpler branding works better.

'**Inconsistency**' explains how motley branding across a company should be avoided and when, in fact, branding used by different staff should be encouraged.

At the end of this section you should know what you need from an email signature.

This paper explains the best ways to create email signatures

Hey Jen,

We're looking at a Monday release date – I know that's not what we discussed, but I'm really up against it. If we can keep two or more of the arabesques as they were, then inlay the remaining bronze patterns, I'm very happy for it to go.

I appreciate you were concerned that the granite and cobblestones might clash, but we don't have a choice. If you have any ideas for altering the fascia in the time available, feel free to let me know.

Yours

John

John Tilbury
Accounting Manager
Tel: +44(0) 1267 042 156   Fax: +44(0) 845 070 3078   Email: john.tilbury@orbitillustration.co.uk

Composition

Every company puts its brand on everything it can – its building, its uniform, its brochures, its direct mail and, of course, its email.

Without it, their most ubiquitous corporate communication medium (Leggatt, 2011) is devoid of identity.

A business may use signatures for external promotion, legal protection (as disclaimers) and internal inclusion – for example, on email from HR or on all staff mail, reminding or informing of ongoing internal communications initiatives.

Every signature includes two types of content – information and imagery.

Simpler signatures may be more effective for some companies and departments: but this only increases the need for consistency and composition strategy.

> " Don't assume more contact details make readers more likely to contact. It's not the case. "

John Tilbury
Accounting Manager
Tel: +44(0) 1267 042 156   Fax: +44(0) 845 070 3078   Email: john.tilbury@orbitillustration.co.uk

Without image elements, or with them simply scaled back, the emphasis lies on the informative content in the email signature – get it wrong, or leave something out, and it's useless. Both are necessary, but some require more of one than the other, depending upon their industry, their role, the sender and even their seniority.

> " Ensure the first signature sent only has the most essential details "

The most obvious pieces are the sender's name, job title and contact details – in the content types above, these would be considered information. Unlike graphics, they take time to consume and are less appealing to the eye than a logo.
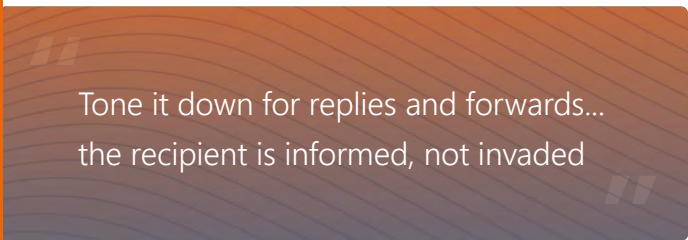
There is a temptation to fill a signature with contact details, assuming that with more contact methods available, a reader is more likely to contact. This isn't the case. While some industries require volumes of contact details, a minimalist approach should be adequate for most business needs: an email and telephone number will suffice.

In markets where an arsenal of contact methods are required, ensure the first signature sent to a contact has only the most essential details – office number, out-of-office number, email addresses and another channel or two, at most.
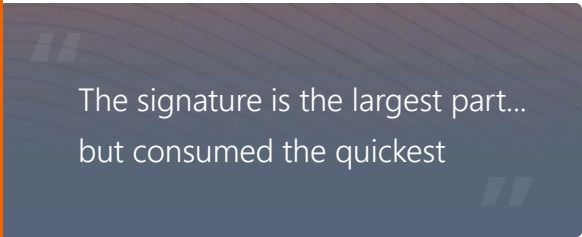
Better yet, virtual business cards can import all of your contact details into a recipient's email client or mobile device, they click it once and their Outlook or iPhone gets your entire contact entry – with every phone number, email address, physical address and instant message profile you've entered.

They're automatically created and attached by some signature software, or users can construct them manually in Outlook – though this takes time and risks errors.

Many users recommend only sending a vCard with the first message in an email chain, excluding it from replies and forwards. However, its inclusion is inoffensive and if an email is forwarded within an organization the sender's vCard can help a tertiary recipient get in touch more easily – imagine an email forwarded from sales to legal and then to the legal director, he might appreciate the vCard's mobile, fax or other uncommon contact detail that would otherwise have cluttered a signature.

> Tone it down for replies and forwards...
> the recipient is informed, not invaded

> The signature is the largest part...
> but consumed the quickest

But tone down the graphical elements of branding for subsequent replies or forwards while increasing the contact details visible in the signature – so the recipient is informed, not invaded.

Even though the ratio between the graphical and quantitative elements has changed, the overall feel of branding has remained somewhat uncluttered.

The next element is the logo – the aesthetic aspect of the signature. This is probably the largest part spatially, but it's consumed the quickest mentally (Youngseek, 2009): users glance once, then move on.

If images are attached and embedded in the message, they don't need to be downloaded post-receipt and won't appear in boxes with a red 'x'. It is possible to use referenced images, like those in a direct marketing email, but they will need to be downloaded as additional content and won't appear in the email immediately.

Despite this, a logo is relied upon to give your brand a personality – Hilton's solid, simple design prefaces its traditional, trusted service, while Google's implies a creative, eccentric personality.

The prominence of a logo and thematic echoes in surrounding email branding might relate to the ideology it's supposed to espouse: Hilton (Web Liquid, 2011) and Google might both be quite minimalist, like the Google homepage for example, but Apple (Apple Inc., 2009) or Coca Cola (Design Council, 2008) might want to inject the entire email with their iconic visual themes.

Social media buttons, RSS feeds and other functionality can be incorporated. A subtle, small corresponding logo – the Twitter 't' (Twitter, 2010) or a LinkedIn 'In' (LinkedIn Inc., 2009) – can be used to indicate users can click to 'Follow', 'Like' (Facebook, 2010) or 'Recommend' that company or product on the relevant social media platform.

These should be deployed with care, noting the meaning of the prompt and its place in the consumer's experience – for example a Twitter 'Follow' might be appropriate for a new user, but a LinkedIn 'Recommend' may be wrong for a prospective customer who hasn't yet used any of their products.

Nonetheless, their pleasant appearance and innocuous size makes them a cost-effective use of screen space in a signature, they're intensely useful if integrated correctly.

Note that each social media provider has its own set of guidelines for using logos, for example the YouTube logo should not be used with 'drop shadow' graphical effects (YouTube, 2009).

Legal disclaimers, though wholly advisable and strictly necessary for some, can jar with the text of an email. A 'thanks for your business' message is spoiled by a notice stating 'the views expressed herein do not reflect those of Corporation A'.

This isn't possible with default Outlook and Exchange signature capabilities, however, signature software can place a disclaimer beneath the very bottom email in a chain of replies – which keeps it away from your most recent email, distancing it visually and semantically.

For many industries, a full-length disclaimer is required, such as tax advisement, and many markets require a company to list its corporate details – like an employer ID number in the US or company registration number and other details in the UK – on every written communication (Exclaimer Ltd., 2007).

Internal communications and corporate culture can also use email branding (Carmichael, 2008), especially where turnover is a concern or skills are a scarce resource.

Internal branding can augment the above in two ways, and each is defined by where it appears. Signatures with departments, job titles, internal extensions and even location (for a Chicago branch or a European headquarters, for example) on every email sent between colleagues, can help them keep in contact more effectively.

HR department emails, or any correspondence between the leadership and the workforce, can include signatures that integrate with morale initiatives: benefits, social events, workplace facilities and other internal communication activities (Vij, 2011).

Summary

- For best results, very slightly favor form above function.

- There can always be more links and contact details in a signature, decide what's truly necessary and ruthlessly remove the unneeded material.

- Minimal contact details, with some social media and web links, can support strong, imposing branding but also accentuate the hygiene of a minimalist design.

Density

Vary the size of signatures to suit different readers and tasks.

The weight of branding has the ability to augment or undermine its intended purpose (Great Look, 2008). Using too much or too little can be offensive or ineffective as recipients miss the message or feel disrupted by it – its density must be carefully matched to its context and audience.

> The weight of branding [can] augment or undermine its intended purpose

Branding above and below the message should be no more than 200 pixels in height, when combined. This limit leaves the designer enough space for a stronger 120-160 pixel section above or below the message and a complementary 40-80 pixel version echoing the style of the first.

Like the palette guidelines in the 'Brightness' section, these limits encompass a range of styles: even the heaviest branding should be no more than 200 pixels tall – but simpler branding might use a single area no more than 100 pixels.

Server-based signature software can apply branding beside the message, like a branded margin to the left of text, for example.

In this instance, a width of no more than 50 pixels is recommended, and more importantly, this margin or indent should contain no textual content – it should solely be a graphical extension of the branding above or below the email text.

This width is a maximum; a margin between 20 and 36 pixels will avoid being missed without cluttering the message.

Finally, the use of this branding on email should be altered to suit various recipients.

Consider a three-tier arsenal of branding with relative differences in size and content.

> Branding on email should be altered to suit different recipients

> Consider a three-tier arsenal of branding… [of varying] sizes and content

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The strongest branding should be used for contacts who still have the opportunity to forget your brand or select another instead, strong imagery creates a qualitative impact on the reader, and with more contact details and social media options the unfamiliar reader has a plurality of contact options to choose from, when necessary.

A median tier which is weaker than the first but stronger than the minimalist version below, should be used for long-time clients, replies to new contacts and other contacts who already know your brand but may still benefit from the content of signatures – new addresses, contact details, offers or logos. In this instance, the goal is to remind not intrude. This version should be shorter than the first and focus more on graphical identity and social media links than a list of contact details.

Finally, an almost completely shorn version should be used for internal mail and mail to corporate suppliers. Colleagues should be familiar with the brand and the sender already – which leaves only an internal extension, job title and minimal graphical touch to provide.

Corporate suppliers require only slightly more, perhaps another contact number or general office line, because in most instances the supplier is competing for the sender's business and a strong evocation of brand value isn't necessary – he wants the sender's business irrespective of the benefits he represents to his own customers. For situations where there is a competitive aspect to corporate supply, like agreeing the best price based on brand presence, the stronger version of branding mentioned above could be useful.

Summary

- The efficacy of branding relies heavily on context – let its function define its form.

- Stronger branding is for newer readers, weaker branding for the more well-acquainted. With long-standing clients, a sender can take shortcuts – linking the company name to its website rather than writing the URL at length, for example.

- If completely lost, remember that different branding can be used at various points in correspondence – a stronger signature on the first email, but simpler branding on replies.

Inconsistency

Branding is for the whole business, not just the sender (Roll, 2004) – when one signature impresses, but the rest are sloppy, it's worse than using nothing at all.

Below, a savvy developer has created a great email signature, compare it to the signature from a ledger clerk at the same company:

One option is to agree on a signature format for everyone and send it to every employee to copy and paste into their signature field on Outlook.

This can be time-consuming, error-prone and scale poorly. A new signature requires sending every user an example to copy, paste and fill with their contact details.

That manual process, each user self-pasting and editing, can cause entry errors or allow users to alter their own signature.

Instructing every user, when finished, to send the IT department a test email can help detect errors, but this adds to the work required and won't stop willful contravention of the signature regulations.

> That manual process... can be time-consuming [and] error-prone

> When one impresses, but the rest are sloppy... it's worse than using nothing

Finally, it makes having multiple different signature types – say one for colleagues and one for clients – exponentially more difficult, with two signatures demanding twice the effort, three signatures three times as much and so forth.

Software can be used to centrally manage signatures and apply updates instantly for every user, and even use logic to decide who should receive which signature.

The worst offenders are smartphones, unless you manage signatures with software on the server. Each smartphone mail client has slight differences, so asking staff to copy and paste, like in the Outlook description above, is nearly untenable.
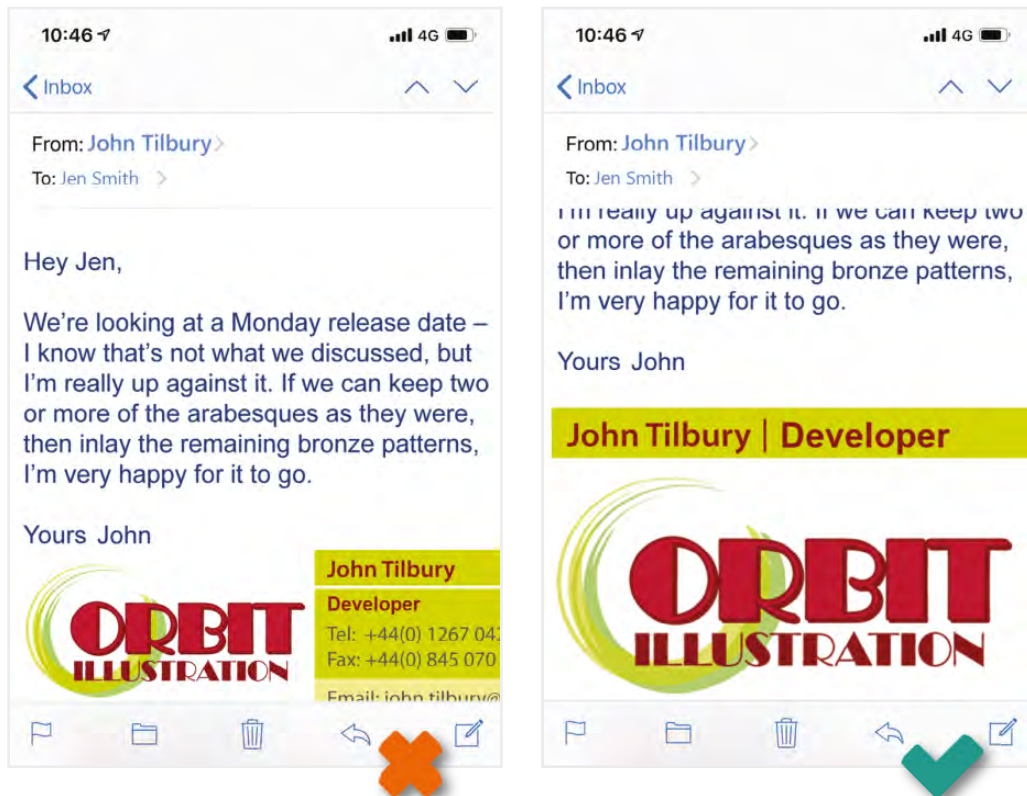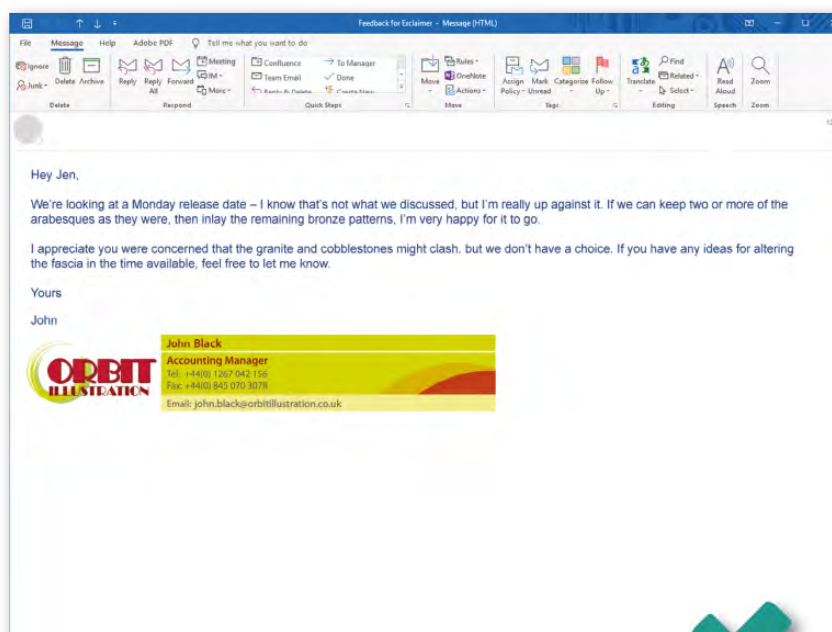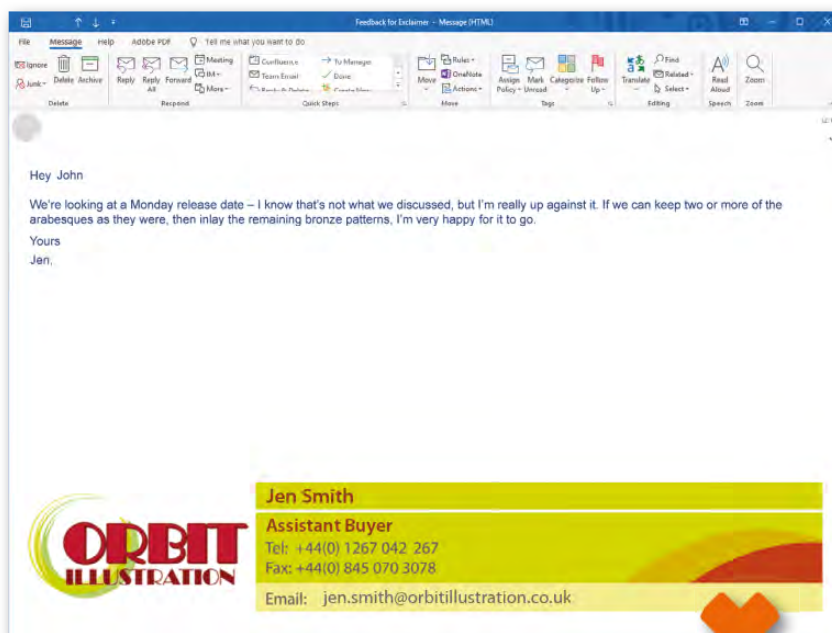

Signature software on a mail server, or Exchange, can add a signature to every email that passes through it – including mail from iPhones, OWA and any device or client.

It's also important that it looks as consistent as possible on multiple devices and clients, both to cater to a variety of readers and for contacts who switch between Outlook and smartphones.

Without dedicated software, you would need to create branding that's simple enough to look identical on every platform:

Signatures can still look impressive, it's just important to keep image text very large and list any contact details above the signature, to cater for a smartphone's often narrower screen.

Summary

- Specialized software is probably the best way to avoid inconsistency, though taking an active approach to signature design will help colossally.

- By centrally managing email branding, you can easily amend and refresh email signatures across the entire organization – not just regulate them.

- We recommend going beyond uniformity: vary your branding according to the sender's department, give customer services one and the sales team another.

VISUAL

In this section we'll examine the visual requirements of a signature: what always looks unpleasant, what only does in some cases and what consistently looks good.

'Brightness' describes the way a signature should be colored: avoiding some, gravitating towards others and good metrics for preventing clumsy images.

'Size' describes the limitations on display and memory size, signatures beyond these limits won't be opened by most clients or will take obstructively long to load.

'Background' explains how HTML coding and coloring can be used to create seamless branding from jpeg images, textboxes and contact details.

This section should teach even veteran designers new methods of improving signature design.
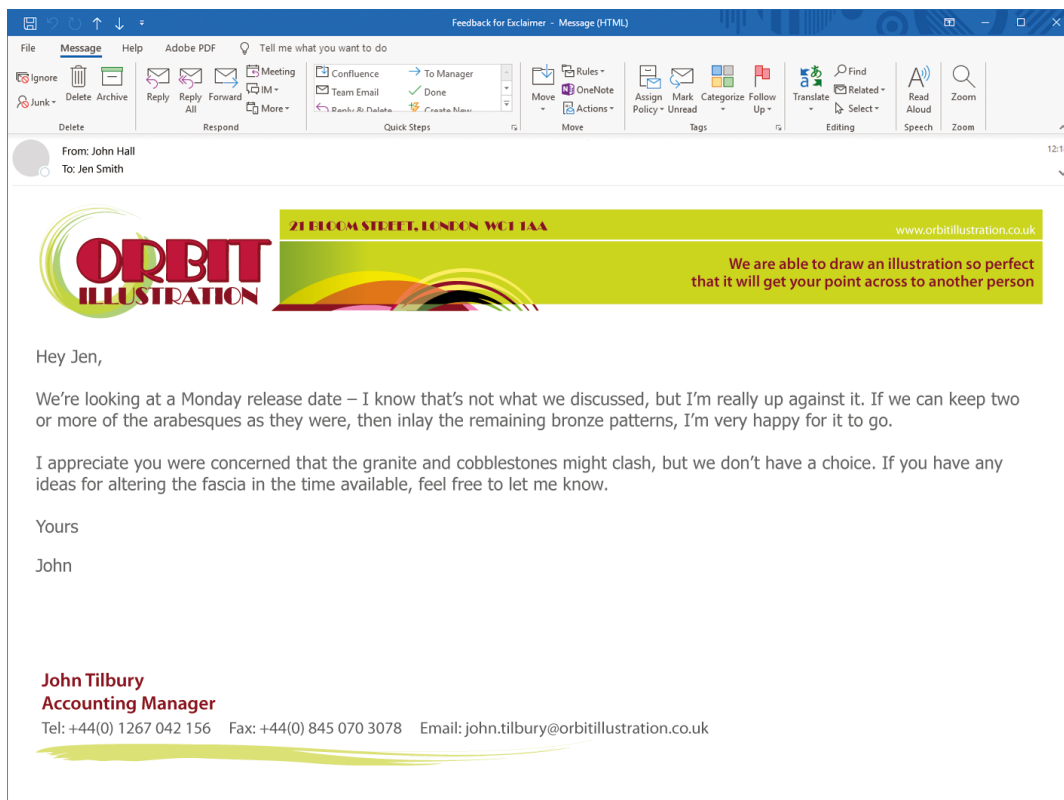
Composition

Bolder colors in print, film and fashion can seem stylish and original – in those contexts, they can work well. Physical media like these will soften a color scheme and flatter more radical styles (Minteer, 2006), but a backlit screen intensifies brightness and encumbers deeper shades.

So the example below, out of context, may look good:
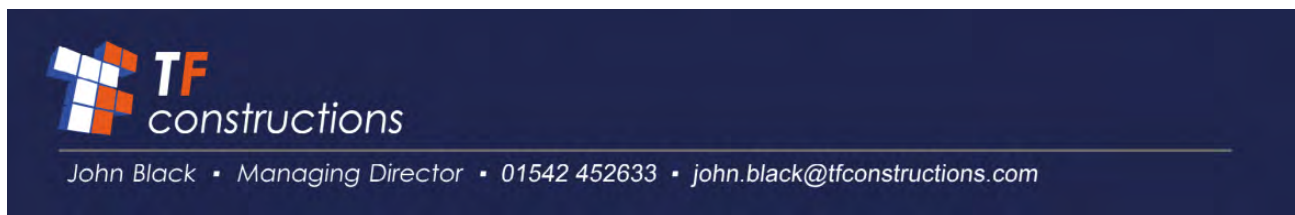
But against the white, plain background of an email it's distracting and overbearing:
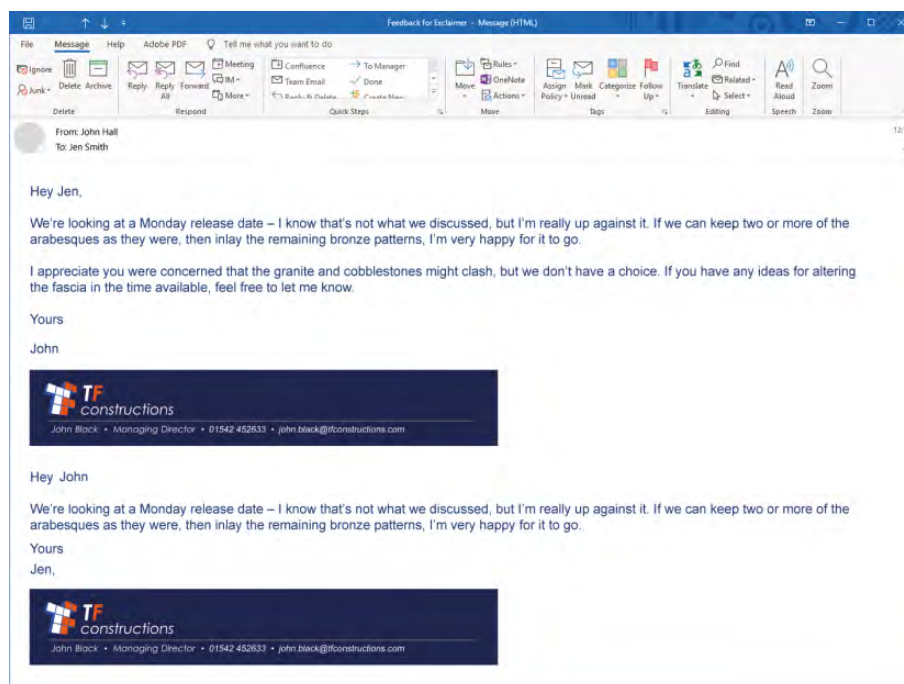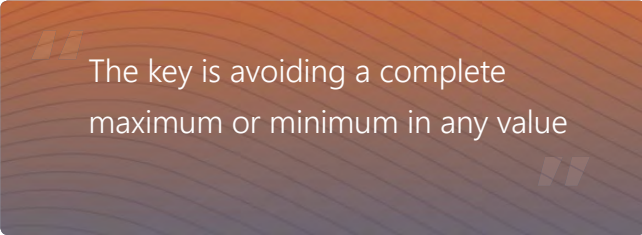

To avoid garish colors, the design experts we consulted recommend a minimum luminescence (also called 'luminosity' or 'brightness') of 190 when saturation is below 200; for RGB values, avoid using completely pure colors: such as one or two colors beyond 150 while the third is less than 50.

The above formula helps create colors that are lively without being intrusive or obnoxious.

Conversely, designers suggested using a saturation between 100 and 150 when luminescence is between 15 and 40, which can create a rich, dark, strong color that comes close to black, but retains the inflection of a more emotive tone. The RGB values for colors like these are likely to be all below 50, especially if one is below 10 but not quite 0.

Remember that the HSL codes will need to be converted to degrees and percentages for CSS' or HTML's color codes. Multiply the H (hue) from Photoshop or other image editor by 1.5 to get a 360 degree code for it, and the SL (saturation and luminosity) codes by 0.41 to get a percentage for them – so a color that's 137, 200, 200 in Photoshop is 205, 83%, 83% in HTML.

> " The key is avoiding a complete maximum or minimum in any value "

The key is avoiding a complete maximum or minimum in any value.

Extremes of brightness, darkness, hue and luminosity not only render poorly, their drastic aesthetic implies a departure from customary business practice, only businesses trying to evoke eccentricity, edginess or similar connotations should use colors close to or beyond these limits.

Extreme colors can work well when used with a gradient (a subtle fade from one color to another) to soften the solidity of a single sharp color, as in the picture below. Users should avoid using one large block, this often looks rudimentary or careless (Smarty, 2008).

This signature is actually very similar to the first example, but a gentle fade from navy to sky blue has broken up its primary color and offset its depth with some contrapuntal crispness, making it more visually digestible:

If using a gradient, ensure no more than 25% of the image is outside of the aforementioned range, and that the gradient has faded to a color within the parameters provided above by at least half way through its transition. A gradient might not be useful to every firm – the mixed colors could conflict with a traditional or uncomplicated reputation, like a global fast food or luxury hotel chain.
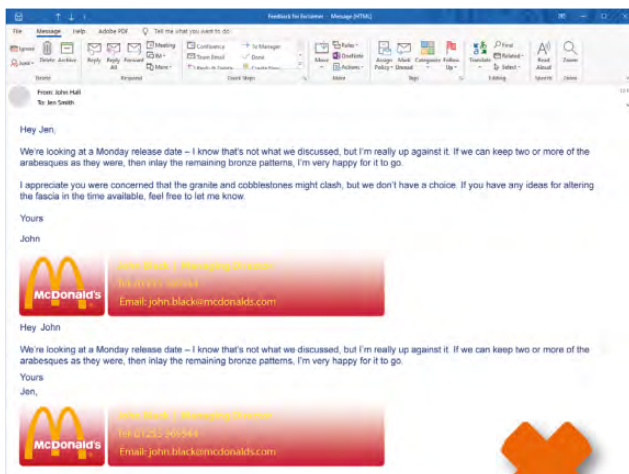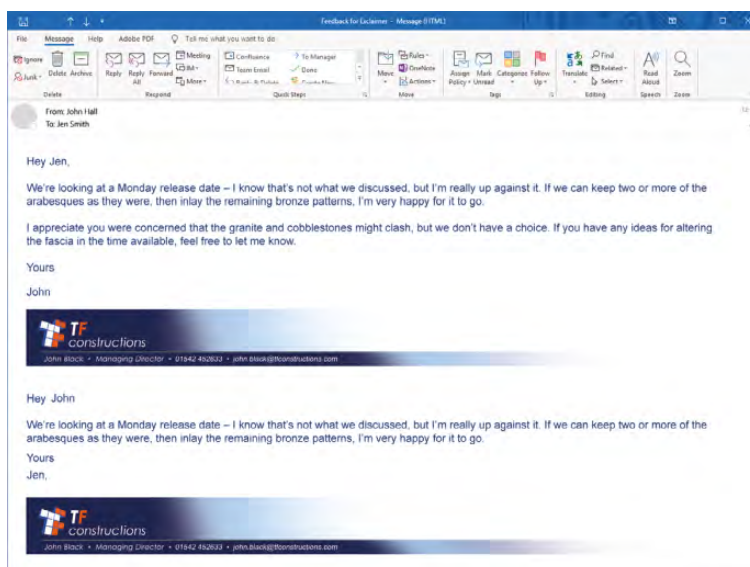
In these cases, brightening the background while darkening the overlaid content can help bring out the detail of your signature and retain its deeper colors. The majority of your image should be within the suggested limits, but you can still use accents and touches of harsher colors in the detail of the logo itself.

Avoid certain colors: any shade of gold will look like khaki on some monitors and configurations. Remember that the darkest reds often appear muddy, while pastel shades of green and yellow can take on a sickly tint.

> A gradient might not be useful to every firm... [it] could conflict with a traditional

> you can still use accents and touches of harsher colors in the detail of the logo
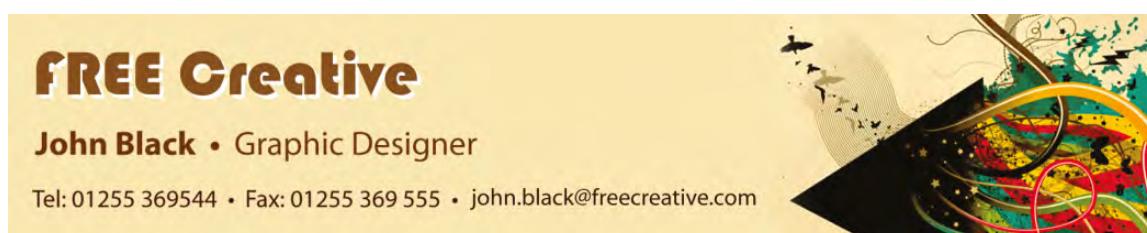

Summary

- Think of where it's going – something dynamic on a matte leaflet can look unpleasant on a backlit monitor.

- Signature software may make this process easier, because quickly testing and comparing even the slightest changes can help improve branding massively.

Size

Both memory requirements and visible size can impair the utility of a signature.

Notice the word 'utility', and not 'quality' – the appearance of the signature may be the same, it just won't be opened by most mail clients. Any quality gained by using a high resolution image will be lost as it shrinks to fit in the signature, so a memory intensive png is much less useful than a 30kb jpeg.

This signature seems satisfactory, but its image is 6mb, which is too large for many email clients to load quickly, or load at all – compare it with this:

It may look identical, but in an image editor (Photoshop, Fireworks or even MS Paint) the main image has been resized, reducing it from 1850x370 pixels to just 600x120.

Note, that wasn't changed within the HTML of their signature, the image isn't just displayed at that size – the file was reduced to those dimensions.

An image that's too wide will create blank space to the right of email text, while an image that's too tall probably won't be seen in full:

Width issues can be resolved using two methods.Firstly, 600 pixels can be treated as a maximum display width, most email will be seen at that size, making it well-suited for the range of mail clients: Outlook, Gmail, Hotmail, etc.

A disadvantage of this method is that when the image is viewed in a window wider than 600 pixels, text will extend beyond the edge of the signature, making it appear to be restricted to the bottom left-hand corner.

To overcome this, the image can be placed in an HTML table with complimentary colors, so the branding extends to the edge of the message while the image remains the same.

Secondly, the entire image can be scaled to fit the window using an HTML 'Width="100%"' property. For best results, the image should be the width of a full-screen window, so it shrinks to fit any smaller reading pane, instead of stretching to accommodate larger windows, and losing its definition.

Any text should be large enough to read on a smartphone's smaller screen, keep in mind that the predominantly landscape shape of an email when read on a desktop client conflicts with the typically portrait layout of a smartphone screen.

Users can circumvent this, once again, using one of two strategies:

Firstly, the most advisable tactic is to put any necessary slogan or strapline – such as "Action IT: The Last Word in Satisfaction" – as text, separate from the image, so it can scale to suit the size of the smartphone screen, desktop monitor, laptop or whatever viewing implement is used to open it.

Secondly, a designer could make the text within the image large enough to remain visible on a smartphone screen. If the preceding dimension instructions have been followed (600x120 pixels), size 27 fonts and above should be adequately visible on most smartphones. If a scaling signature has been used, making each letter roughly 30% the height of the image should give it the prominence required.

> good visible image sizes vary with the client or devicereputation

Summary

- Scaling signatures, that resize to fit the viewing window, are best.

- While very large images are always inadvisable, good visible image sizes vary with the client or device used to read them.

- New customers or potential leads could benefit from larger branding, which would use a larger picture, but a long-time client may appreciate a gentler style.

Background

Vibrant images behind text can spruce up a webpage - but they rarely work in email.

Background images only work in Yahoo and similar online webmail clients, but they don't render properly in Gmail (Email Standards Project, 2011), Outlook (Email Standards Project, 2007) or Hotmail (Email Standards Project, 2011).

Outlook uses the same rendering system as Microsoft Word (Greiner, 2007), which makes it easier to copy and paste content between them, but rules out some higher HTML functionality – like background images.

Outlook does accept background colors, if you wanted to achieve a similar effect – background colors can be defined with the same precision as any HTML webpage, in HSL, RGB or basic HTML codes.

Remember that when defining an HSL color in HTML the 'Sat' and 'Lum' values must be converted to percentages, both by dividing by 240. While the 'Hue' value would need to be converted to degrees by multiplying the value by 1.5. For example, what is 109, 180, 140 in Photoshop would be 163, 75%, 58% in HTML.

If you frequently deal with consumers and readers using webmail, background images can work perfectly.

They're most effective in the signature, with an interesting brand image behind contact details and other data – not behind the text body, which makes the text illegible, the image unclear and clutters the entire message.

> If you frequently deal with webmail, background images can work wellreputation

> They're most effective in the signature - not behind the text body

You could use two signatures, one for webmail and one for Outlook. Server-based software can even inspect the domain name and automatically use the best format.

One message to multiple software types, both webmail and Outlook, could automatically display the right email for each recipient:

Summary

- Backgrounds can give an email personality, but any setting that distracts from the message should be avoided. It needs to underscore without overwhelming.

- We recommend restricting background colors to the contact detail section of your signature: there, they can support without detracting from the overall message.

- They also draw the eye towards content, and – if used cleverly – can create the impression the details and images are all parts of a single contiguous piece of branding.

TECHNICAL

The sections in this 'Technical' chapter relate to the construction and implementation of signatures.

'Scripts and Formatting' will detail how CSS behaves in most email clients, its prohibited scripting functions and methods for achieving similar effects without them.

'Embedded Media and Animation' expands on the scripting limitations discussed, noting an incompatibility of video content and, as before, how its effects can be approximated by other features.

> Nearly every scripted function is prohibited to prevent malicious activity

> HSL colors... can be entered directly into CSS... albeit converted to percentage

'Bifurcation' describes how signatures can be automatically or manually adjusted to suit different recipients, and the options for each email set-up.

At the end of this section the reader should be able to construct the email signatures discussed in the preceding portion of this paper.

Scripts and Formatting

CSS, Javascript and other scripting languages don't quite work in email. Nearly every scripted function is prohibited, to prevent malicious activity.

CSS receives some support, which we'll inspect below, but Javascript is completely incompatible – which, as discussed in the 'Embedded Media and Animation' section, precludes the use of any animation or Flash scripting.

'E:Classname', 'E#id' and 'E:link' selectors have full functionality in every Outlook since 2003 (Campaign Monitor, 2011), that means CSS can be used to control bold fonts, for example, or the color and format of link text.

Crucially for signature construction, Outlook allows the border-collapse and margin properties from CSS, making it easier to tighten up and open out contact details within tables in your signature.

Finally, the HSL colors mentioned in the 'Brightness' section can be entered directly into CSS, albeit with saturation and luminosity converted to percentages – so 120 would be 50%.

Webmail, like Gmail or Yahoo, tends to support more CSS properties than even the desktop software accompanying these online services – like the Windows Live Mail application which allows fewer CSS properties than its browser-based counterpart, Hotmail.

Below, a signature tries to use cascading style sheets to control the colors behind the contact details – unsuccessfully.
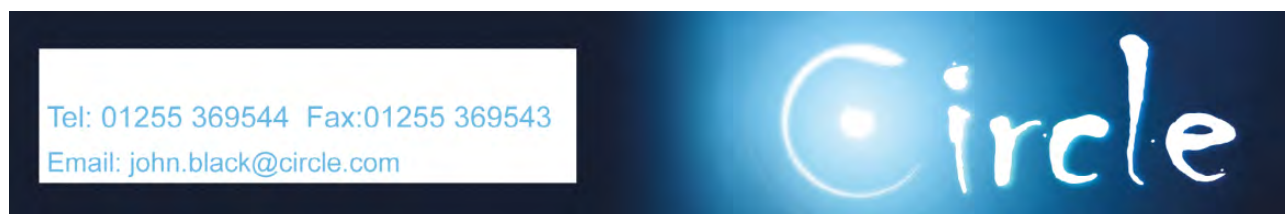
Instead, create an HTML text container and define the background color there, use the 'div' tag to define its height and width in pixels and its color in HSL, RGB or Hex values – a 'span' tag can work too, but text won't wrap, as recommended in the 'Size' section.

Match its color to the edges of any adjoining images in the signature so it appears to be one fluid graphic:

In the above, these contact details taken from the Active Directory look as if they're part of the signature's image – but if it's poorly spaced they can overlap sloppily:

> If you use a bespoke or rare font... it won't work unless the recipient has it

You could either set a 'display: block' function on certain details to ensure text wraps and the element won't stretch, or strategically space the signature so it's less likely to clash.

inlay the remaining bronze patterns, I'm very happy for it to go.

I appreciate you were concerned that the granite and cobblestones might clash don't have a choice. If you have any ideas for altering the fascia in the time a feel free to let me know.

Yours

John

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Fax: +44(0) 845 070 3078
Email: graham.hall@dataplus.co.uk

DATA PLUS

If you use a customized or rare font, like one designed just for your firm, it won't work unless the recipient has it too – it may just appear as Times New Roman instead.

Set fallback fonts to appear if the recipient doesn't have your original font: Arial, Verdana, Tahoma and Lucida are good choices for universal compatibility, but a business-focused firm could use Calibri because it's supported in every version of Microsoft Office since 2007.

Summary

- If you're willing to expend some effort, you can replicate a lot of CSS functionality without CSS.

- Coding the HTML manually requires an expert hand, so for the more refined techniques a web designer or programmer is required – if it's done manually.

- Using signature software will let you control it through a content editor, placing and manipulating elements like you would in Microsoft Word or PowerPoint.

Embedded Media and Animation

Flash, certain GIFs and other animations won't work in your signature – expect your GIF to freeze on the first slide, and Flash to totally disappear.
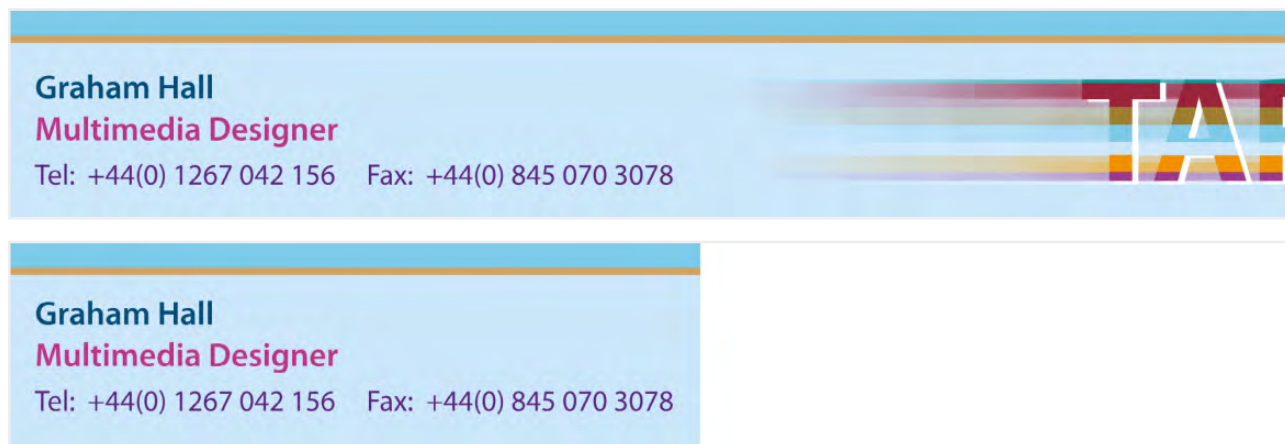
As discussed in the 'Scripts and Formatting' section, almost all scripts are prohibited, so all animations of nearly any kind are excluded, embedding a YouTube video, or content from any online video streaming site, will fail (Brownlow, 2008).

This also means web applications using Silverlight, JavaScript or Flash cannot be embedded, nor can banners (whether GIF or Flash) that rely on animation.

If the animation was intended to showcase a series of promotions, it's possible to achieve a 'rolling' banner with some signature software. Exchange software can detect whether the recipient has already been sent a particular graphic that day and display an alternate version, while Outlook add-on software can routinely update users' signatures to achieve a similar effect.

> Applications using Silverlight, Flash or JavaScript cannot be embedded

The emails below display a new image each time, in this case for a series of offers:
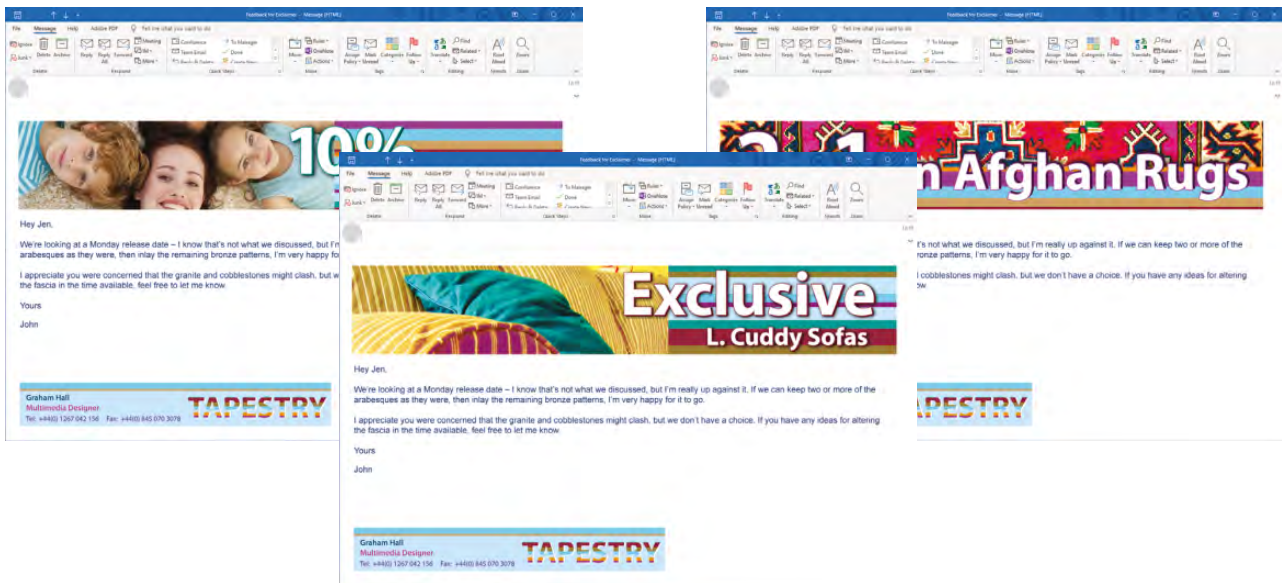
[P38], [P39] and [P40]

In this way, contacts can also be shown refreshed or revitalized branding on each new email, color schemes could change for example. In a longer chain, each subsequent email would retain the impact of the first. This tactic is recommended for a firm whose aesthetic image is part of the value in their product or service, like a design agency or high-end glassware firm, because for many businesses this effect may be too decorative.

Instead, you can add an image which links to your video, so it's less intrusive and sends more readers to your site.

In this way, contacts can also be shown refreshed or revitalized branding on each new email, color schemes could change for example. In a longer chain, each subsequent email would retain the impact of the first. This tactic is recommended for a firm whose aesthetic image is part of the value in their product or service, like a design agency or high-end glassware firm, because for many businesses this effect may be too decorative.

Instead, you can add an image which links to your video, so it's less intrusive and sends more readers to your site.

Images in the signature are embedded, not linked or simply attached, so they will appear as intended immediately – and never as red crosses or other placeholders indicating the need to download additional content.

This does mean that recipients will see precisely the desired image when the email is opened, though this does mean that especially large images – as covered in the 'Size' section – may be incompatible with certain clients.
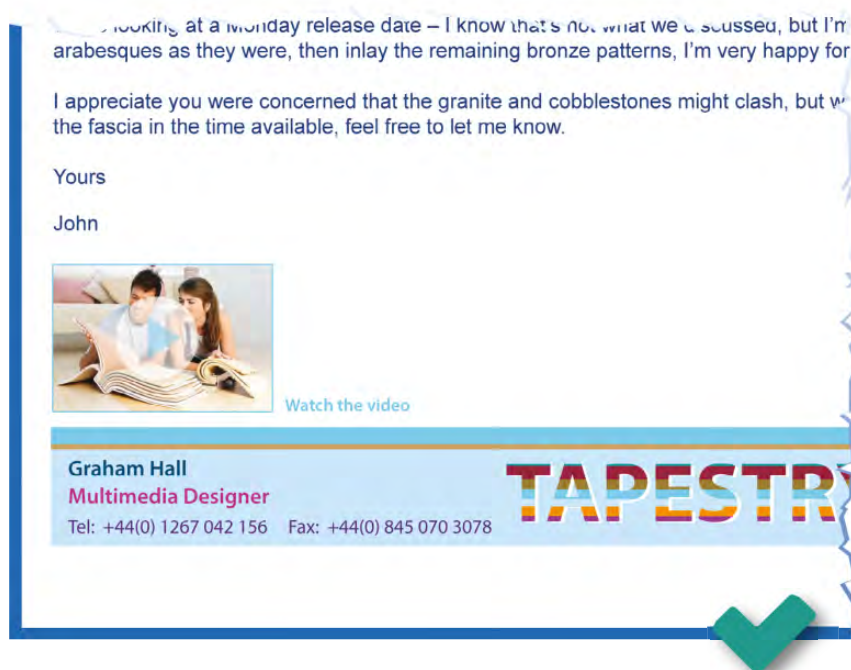
Summary

- Email signatures are better without video.

- Animation can create clutter: a signature should be a sharp impact, not a protracted block of motion and complexity.

- Making a signature interesting on its own merits is far more effective than using incongruent content.

Bifurcation

Exchange, Outlook and add-on software can adjust branding for different readers.

A prospective customer for one product can see completely different branding to a long-time client using a separate service.

Outlook allows the creation and deployment of multiple signatures, which can be selected from a drop-down menu as the sender writes an email. Outlook can apply a default signature when a blank message is opened which prevents the email from leaving with no signature at all, but this risks it being sent with the wrong signature.

Outlook has no automatic functionality for changing signatures based on the reader, or even centrally managing company-wide email branding, every user must copy and paste their signatures into different templates so a set of three signatures takes three times as long as one signature, five signatures five times longer and so on.

As mentioned in the 'Inconsistency' section, this leaves the opportunity for pasting errors, such as forgetting to rewrite a 'your name here' field or incorrectly writing a web address – note as well that even the slightest update carries the same difficulty and risk.

Signature software can be used to centrally manage Outlook signatures, automating the process of signature syndication – a user's set of signatures will be automatically updated every 15 minutes, or whenever the template is updated, and the correct set will be applied to the appropriate users: Dutch signatures for the Amsterdam case manager, internal signatures for the HR manager, for example.

The date and time can be used in signature software to customize branding; they can recurrently auto-adjust, like using special weekend branding between 6pm Friday and 9am Monday, or change for a set period of time , like promoting a 4-week sale – and the two can even be combined: displaying special signatures every weekend during a set period, for example.

> [Without] automatic functionality even the slightest update carries the same difficulty

Outlook can only add signatures below the email text, no letterheads above the email or margins beside it, but Exchange and signature software can add branding below, beside or above the message and even place certain elements, like disclaimers, at the very end of the email, beneath any replies or forwards.
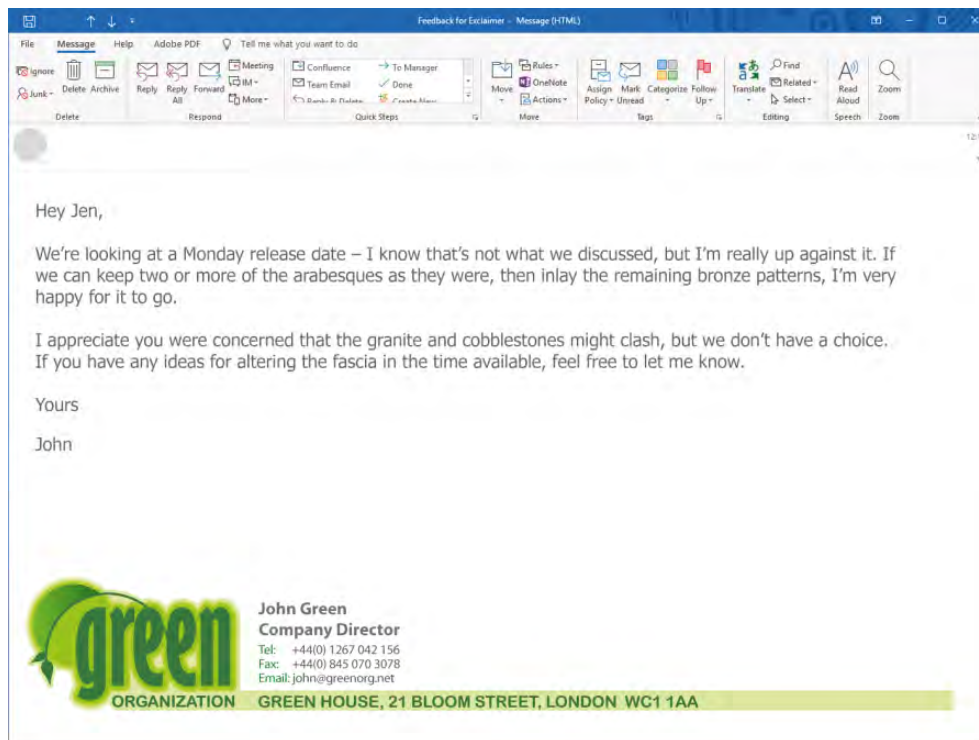
Summary

- Don't think of it as bifurcation, think of it as compatibility.

- Use a level of branding that's consistent with each task or goal – lighter signatures for replies, stronger branding for first-time contacts.

- Underwhelming can be as detrimental as oversaturating; consider the context and the related business needs to get email signatures that impress any reader, in any situation.

FINAL SUMMARY

The need for signatures is best demonstrated by the rarity of their absence.

The largest companies brand everything (Colyer, 2004), often at enormous cost, and the sharpest never neglect the most used communication medium – email.

This paper recommends relying on expertise, whether it's acquired by appointing an IT admin to manage signatures or using software to automate email signatures.

It simplifies the creation, regulation and specification elements of email signatures. Institutionally, users and experts on email signatures tend to be disparate; marketing, design, HR and legal teams are usually separate from the technical staff who would usually make the signatures, disclaimers and other email branding they ask for. By allowing them to design every user's signature, from their desks, and give IT the ability to control policies and update with a single click – signature software improves the efficacy of signatures, while removing any effort they would require.

The best results, both commercial, technical and aesthetic, are achieved with add-on products – an IT admin's time is often precious, and good email signature software won't require expert knowledge to use.

In some ways, however, careful thought is the most important ingredient – so if you chose to read this white paper, you're already doing it right.

APPENDICES

Pastel Shades' Suggested Guidelines	
Hue	[any value]
Sat	<200
Lum	>190

Dark Colors' Suggested Guidelines	
Hue	[any value]
Sat	100-150
Lum	15-40

Photoshop to HTML, HSL Color Values Conversion	
Photoshop	to HTML
Hue	x1.5
Sat	x0.4
Lum	x0.4
HTML	**to Photoshop**
Hue	x0.667
Sat	x2.4
Lum	x2.4

Email Script Limitations (source: Campaign Monitor)

Style Element	Outlook 2007/10[1]	Outlook 2000/03	Apple iPhone/iPad	Windows Live Hotmail	Apple Mail 4	Yahoo! Mail Beta	Google Gmail	Android 2.3 (Gmail)[2]
<style> in <head>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
<style> in <body>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Link Element	Outlook 2007/10[1]	Outlook 2000/03	Apple iPhone/iPad	Windows Live Hotmail	Apple Mail 4	Yahoo! Mail Beta	Google Gmail	Android 2.3 (Gmail)[2]
<link> in <head>	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
<link> in <body>	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Selectors[3]	Outlook 2007/10[1]	Outlook 2000/03	Apple iPhone/iPad	Windows Live Hotmail	Apple Mail 4	Yahoo! Mail Beta	Google Gmail	Android 2.3 (Gmail)[2]
*	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
E[foo]	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E[foo="bar"]	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E[foo~="bar"]	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E[foo^="bar"]	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E[foo$="bar"]	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E[foo*="bar"]	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E:nth-child(n)	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E:nth-last-child(n)	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E:nth-of-type(n)	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E:nth-last-of-type(n)	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E:first-child	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E:last-child	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E:first-of-type	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E:last-of-type	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E:empty	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E:link	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗[4]	✗	✗
E:visited	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗[4]	✗	✗
E:active	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
E:hover	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
E:focus	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E:target	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
E::first-line	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
E::first-letter	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
E::before	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E::after	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E:classname	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗[3]	✗
E#id	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗[3]	✗
E:not(s)	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
E F	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
E > F	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗

Selectors[3]	Outlook 2007/10[1]	Outlook 2000/03	Apple iPhone/iPad	Windows Live Hotmail	Apple Mail 4	Yahoo! Mail Beta	Google Gmail	Android 2.3 (Gmail)[2]
E + F	✗	✗	✔	✗	✔	✔	✗	✗
E ~ F	✗	✔	✔	✗	✔	✗	✗	✗

Text & Fonts	Outlook 2007/10[1]	Outlook 2000/03	Apple iPhone/iPad	Windows Live Hotmail	Apple Mail 4	Yahoo! Mail Beta	Google Gmail	Android 2.3 (Gmail)[2]
direction	✗	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
font	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
font-family	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
font-style	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
font-variant	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
font-size	✔	✔	ⓘ[5]	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
font-weight	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
letter-spacing	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
line-height	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
text-align	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
text-decoration	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
text-indent	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
text-overflow CSS3	✗	✔	✔	ⓘ[6]	✔	ⓘ[6]	ⓘ[7]	✔
text-shadow CSS3	✗	✗	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
text-transform	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
white-space	✔	✗	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
word-spacing	✗	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
word-wrap CSS3	✗	ⓘ[8]	✔	✔	✔	✔	✗	✗
vertical-align	✗	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔

Color & Background	Outlook 2007/10[1]	Outlook 2000/03	Apple iPhone/iPad	Windows Live Hotmail	Apple Mail 4	Yahoo! Mail Beta	Google Gmail	Android 2.3 (Gmail)[2]
color	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
background	ⓘ[9]	✔	✔	ⓘ[9]	✔	✔	ⓘ[9]	ⓘ[9]
background-color	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
background-image	✗	✔	✔	✗	✔	✔	✗	✗
background-position	✗	✔	✔	✗	✔	✔	✗	✗
background-repeat	✗	✔	✔	✗	✔	✔	✗	✗
HSL Colors CSS3	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
HSLA Colors CSS3	✗	✗	✔	✗	✔	✗	✗	✗
Opacity CSS3	✗	✗	✔	✔	✔	✗	✗	✗
RGBA Colors CSS3	✗	✗	✔	✗	✔	✗	✗	✗

Box Model	Outlook 2007/10[1]	Outlook 2000/03	Apple iPhone/iPad	Windows Live Hotmail	Apple Mail 4	Yahoo! Mail Beta	Google Gmail	Android 2.3 (Gmail)[2]
border	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
box-shadow CSS3	✗	✗	✗	ⓘ[10]	✗	✗	✗	✗
height	✗	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
margin	✔	✔	✔	ⓘ[11]	✔	✔	✔	✔

Box Model	Outlook 2007/10[1]	Outlook 2000/03	Apple iPhone/iPad	Windows Live Hotmail	Apple Mail 4	Yahoo! Mail Beta	Google Gmail	Android 2.3 (Gmail)[2]
padding	ⓘ[12]	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
width	ⓘ[19]	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
max-width	✖	✖	✔	✖	✔	ⓘ[17]	ⓘ[17]	✔
min-width	✖	✖	✔	✖	✔	ⓘ[18]	ⓘ[18]	✔

Positioning & Display	Outlook 2007/10[1]	Outlook 2000/03	Apple iPhone/iPad	Windows Live Hotmail	Apple Mail 4	Yahoo! Mail Beta	Google Gmail	Android 2.3 (Gmail)[2]
bottom	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✖	✖	✖
clear	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
clip	✖	✔	✔	✖	✔	✖	✖	✖
cursor	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✖	✖
display	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✖	✖
float	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
left	✖	✔	✔	✖	✔	✖	✖	✖
opacity	✖	✖	✔	✔	✔	✖	✖	✖
outline CSS3	✖	✖	✔	ⓘ[13]	✔	ⓘ[13]	ⓘ[13]	✖
overflow	✖	✔	✔	ⓘ[14]	✔	ⓘ[14]	ⓘ[14]	ⓘ[15]
position	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✖	✖	✖
resize CSS3	✖	✔	✔	ⓘ[16]	✔	ⓘ[16]	✖	✖
right	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✖	✖	✖
top	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✖	✖	✖
visibility	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✖	✖
z-index	✔	✔	✔	✖	✔	✖	✖	✖

Lists	Outlook 2007/10[1]	Outlook 2000/03	Apple iPhone/iPad	Windows Live Hotmail	Apple Mail 4	Yahoo! Mail Beta	Google Gmail	Android 2.3 (Gmail)[2]
list-style-image	✖	✔	✔	✖	✔	✔	✖	✖
list-style-position	✖	✔	✔	✖	✔	✔	✖	✖
list-style-type	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✖

Tables	Outlook 2007/10[1]	Outlook 2000/03	Apple iPhone/iPad	Windows Live Hotmail	Apple Mail 4	Yahoo! Mail Beta	Google Gmail	Android 2.3 (Gmail)[2]
border-collapse	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
border-spacing	✖	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
caption-side	✖	✖	✖	✔	✖	✔	✔	✔
empty-cells	✖	✖	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
table-layout	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Total Market Share	**27.62%**		**16.01%**	**12.14%**	**11.13%**	**9.54%**	**7.02%**	**1.7%**

Embedded Media and Animation

[1] For full CSS rendering capabilities, see MSN Developer docs

[2] Tested on a Google Nexus S

[3] Works in some instances if CSS is inlined before or during campaign import

[4] CSS hack required for link colors - see fix for Yahoo! Mail Beta

[5] By default, minimum font size is 13px

[6] text-overflow: ellipsis; does not work

[7] text-overflow: ellipsis; does not work in Firefox

[8] word-wrap: normal; not supported

[9] Background images not supported

[10] No in Safari, Yes in Firefox

[11] Hotmail doesn't support "margin" or "margin-top"

[12] Padding for p and div tags is not supported

[13] Inner and outer border are collapsed

[14] overflow: hidden; does not work

[15] overflow: scroll; does not work

[16] IE: Yes. Otherwise, inline text field with scrollbar displays, but no resize tab

[17] IE7: Partial support. Good in IE9, Safari, Firefox, Chrome

[18] IE7: No support. Good in IE9, Safari, Firefox, Chrome

[19] Width property works on block-level HTML elements like tables and table cells, but not when applied to inline elements (eg. span, div, p). By default, inline elements are set to 100% width in Outlook '07. For full CSS rendering capabilities, see MSN Developer docs.

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