Fate of ISP Inbox Features: what's changed with Schema and Annotations

May 21, 2024 2:00 pm EST
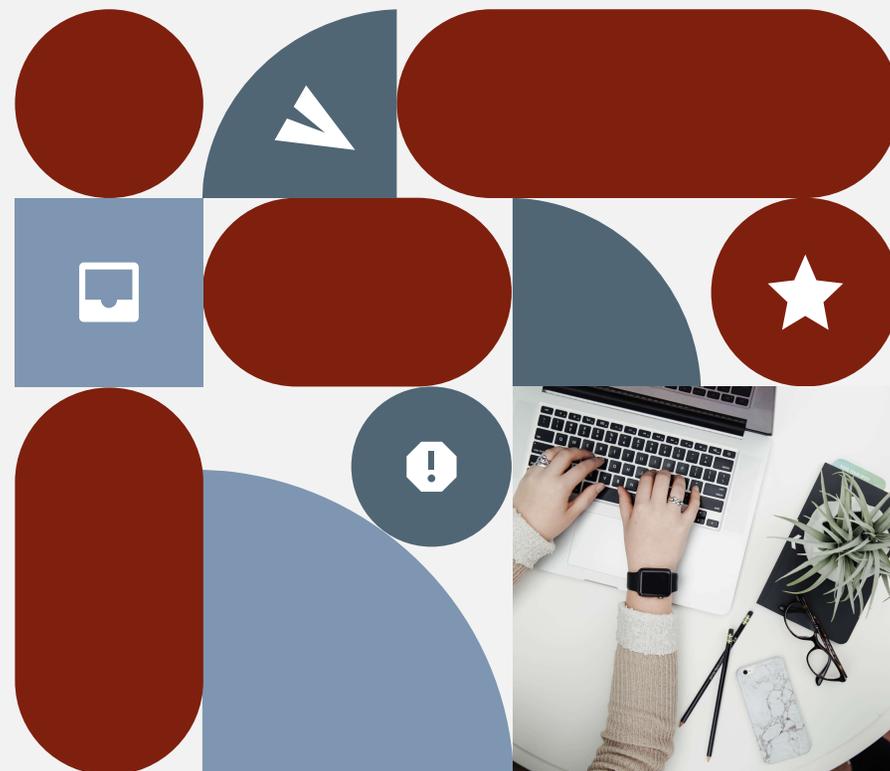
Agenda

2:00-2:05 pm	**Timeline of Annotations:** Understanding why adoption is taking so long?

2:00-2:05 pm — **Timeline of Annotations:**
Understanding why adoption is taking so long?

2:05-2:10 pm — **New experiences in the Gmail promotions tab:**
Observations and changes

2:10-2:20 pm — **Issues and challenges**:
Lack of testing, measurement, retail vertical specific

2:20-2:30 pm — **Closing recommendations:**
Is it worth the effort?

Moderator & Panelists

Pam Lord

GVP, CX Marketing Consulting
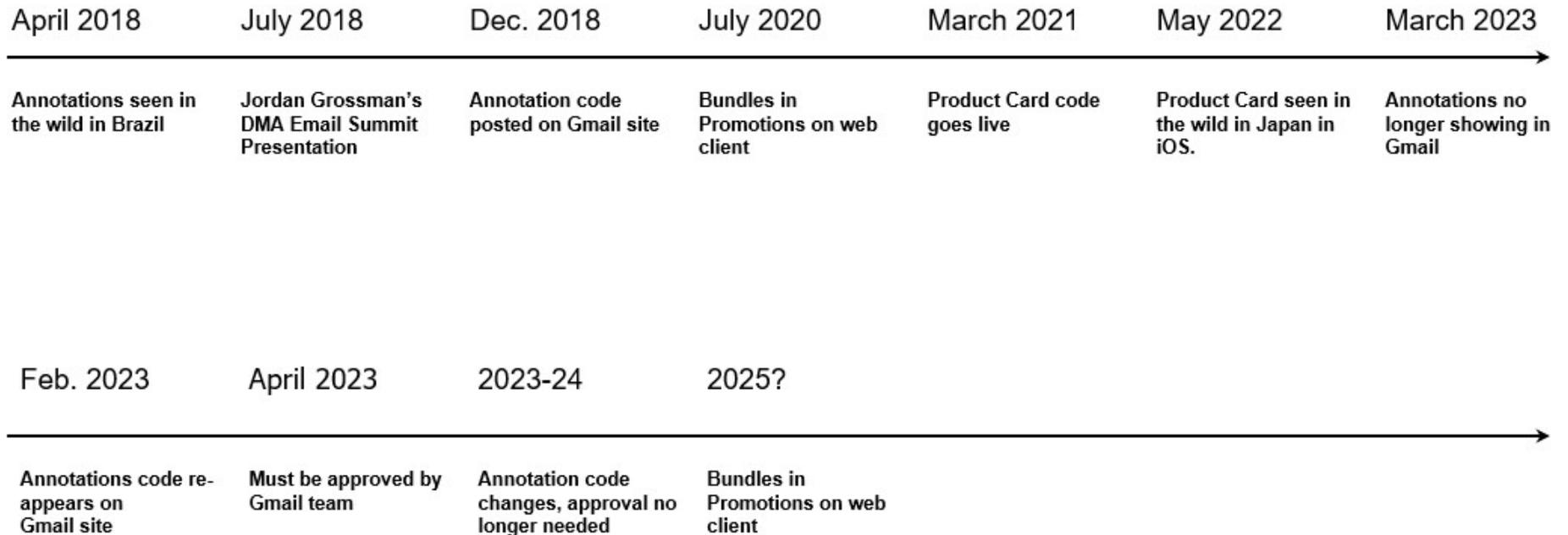
ORACLE

Brian Sisolak

Partner

MESSAGE

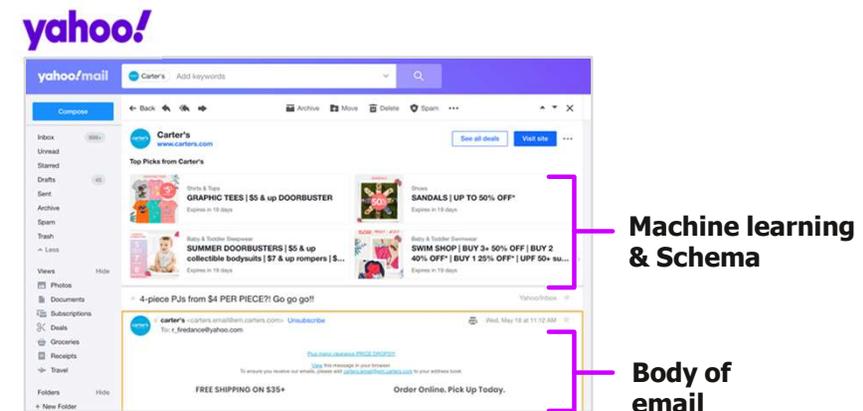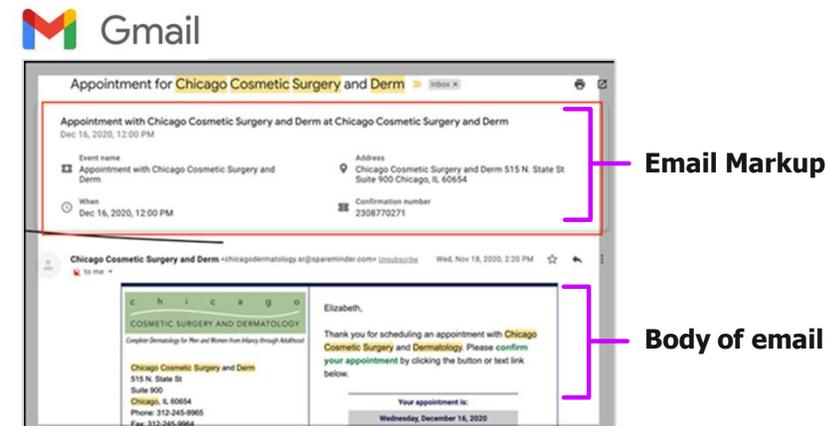**Heather Goff**

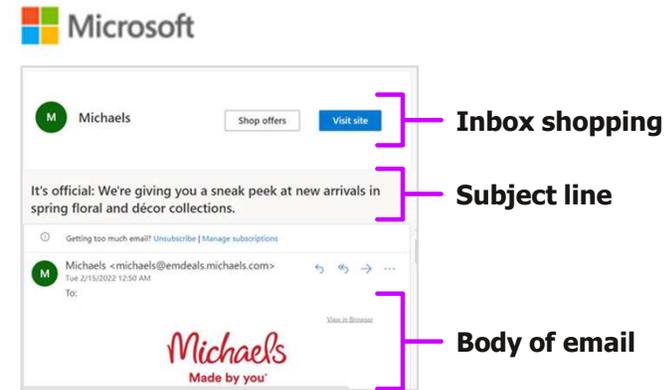Sr. Director Deliverability Strategy & Consulting

ORACLE

Timeline of Gmail Annotations

April 2018	July 2018	Dec. 2018	July 2020	March 2021	May 2022	March 2023
Annotations seen in the wild in Brazil	Jordan Grossman's DMA Email Summit Presentation	Annotation code posted on Gmail site	Bundles in Promotions on web client	Product Card code goes live	Product Card seen in the wild in Japan in iOS.	Annotations no longer showing in Gmail

Feb. 2023	April 2023	2023-24	2025?
Annotations code re-appears on Gmail site	Must be approved by Gmail team	Annotation code changes, approval no longer needed	Bundles in Promotions on web client

ISP changes & commercial email

- ISP's carry the burden of the cost of hosting free webmail email accounts ($$$)

- Email users think about their email account as if it is their personal database and do not clean it out

- ISP's are embracing the shopping to share expense with senders/brands

- ISP's are using machine learning to help consumers identify the most important emails or save the consumer time by pulling out promotions, discounts and product images from emails and placing them above the email in a new visual presentation

- This is not just a one off with one ISP "beta testing" this is a trend across several of the large ISP's (Gmail, Yahoo and Microsoft)…what does this mean for senders

Microsoft — Inbox shopping, Subject line, Body of email

Gmail — Email Markup, Body of email

yahoo! — Machine learning & Schema, Body of email

Changes with Gmail Promo Tab Features

Deals annotations now appears on any email in the Promo Tab.

Upcoming Features

- **Product Carousel:** We're now able to show a carousel of products in your email, complete with descriptions and prices. When a Gmail user taps on a product, **they'll be taken directly to your brand's website.** This will make your subscribers' Promo Tab more easily scannable and digestible

- **Single Image Preview:** We still support single images, but we now support nearly every common product image aspect ratio. We know from experiments that users are **much more likely** to visit a brand's website for merchant's using these rich image features.
Our recommendation: 2:3, 4:5, 1:1, 3:2, and 1.91:1

- Our **Deal Annotation** feature allows you to surface the sale and deal information directly in the **email teaser.** You can annotate a description of the promotion, a coupon code, and the start and end dates of the sale. In the past, text annotations only showed when an email appeared in Top Picks.
Deal Annotations now appear on any email in the Promo Tab. We also support annotation of **Start** and **Expiration** Dates for deals.
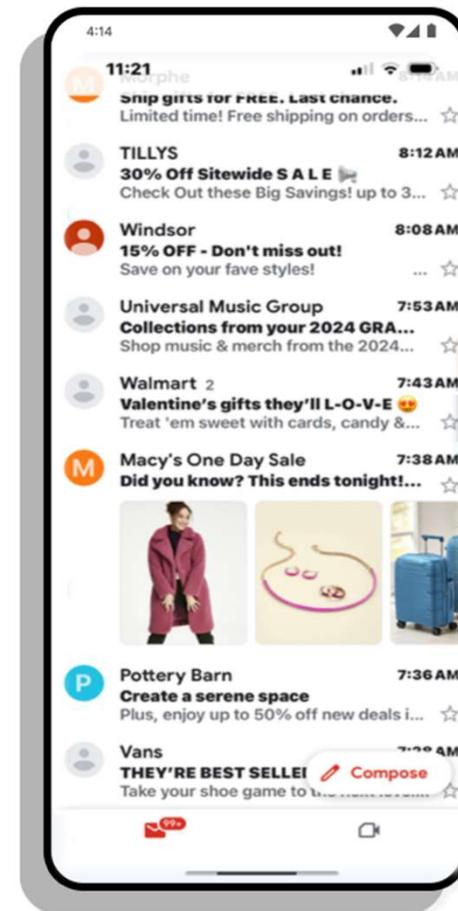
2 Implementation types at Gmail now:

Manual Annotation

Manual Annotation gives you __full control__, allowing you to send Promo Tab emails marked up with structured data, per our specifications.

Simply add annotation code to your email templates/HTML, to include carousels in your promotional emails.

Why is this the best method?

1) You can select the images shown.
2) You can add descriptions to your images.
3) You can add prices and discount prices.

Automatic Extraction

Automatic Extraction automatically extracts product images and information if no structured data is provided by you.

This algorithm does not give you control over content shown.

1) You have no control over which images will appear in the annotation.
2) You can't include a description or price information on your products.

Example of manual annotations
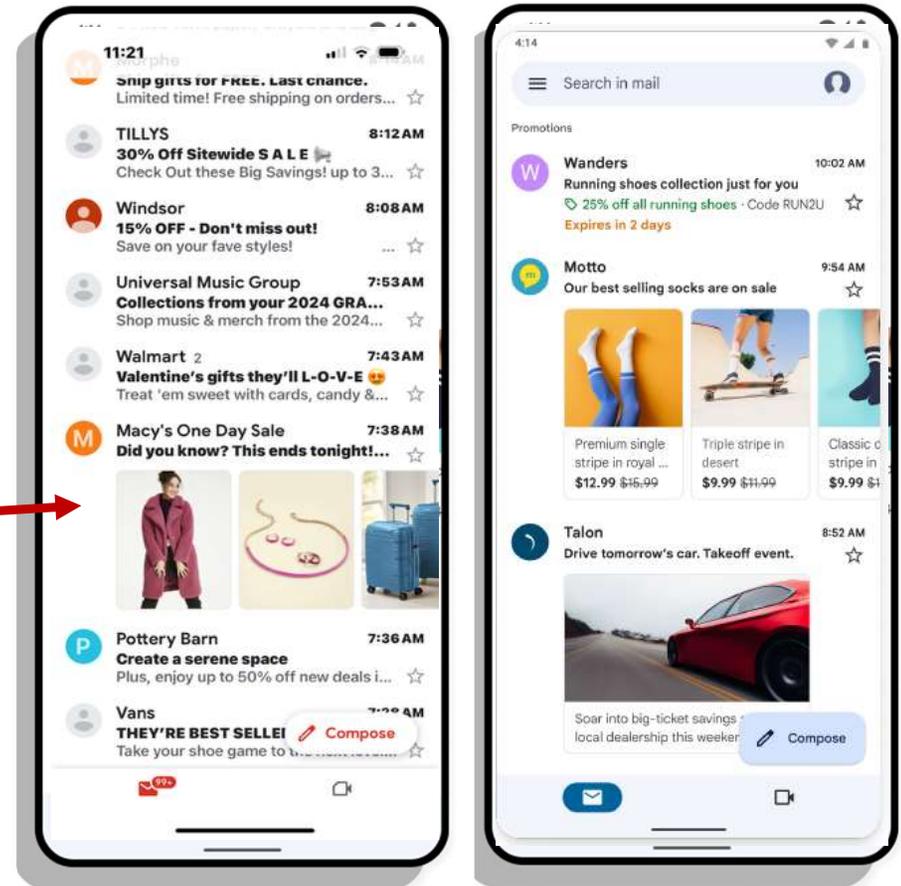
Content Quality parameters now:

Gmail has an allow list with a limited list of brands. Gmail uses this list to control usage and prevent potential abuse. Gmail will ensure your brand is on the allow list

Still all rich imagery passes through a quality filter. Be sure to use high quality images to maximize the number of your product images that Gmail shows. You're more likely to pass quality filters if images include little text and are rectangular (avoid masks that make them appear round). The image size should at least be 256X256.

In the past, logos were only displayed when an email made it into the Top Picks. Now, it is possible for all senders adhering to Brand Indicators for Message Identification (BIMI) standard.
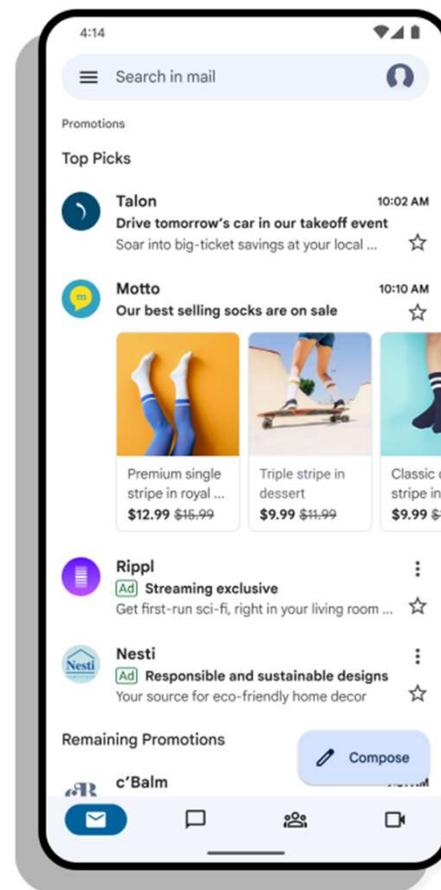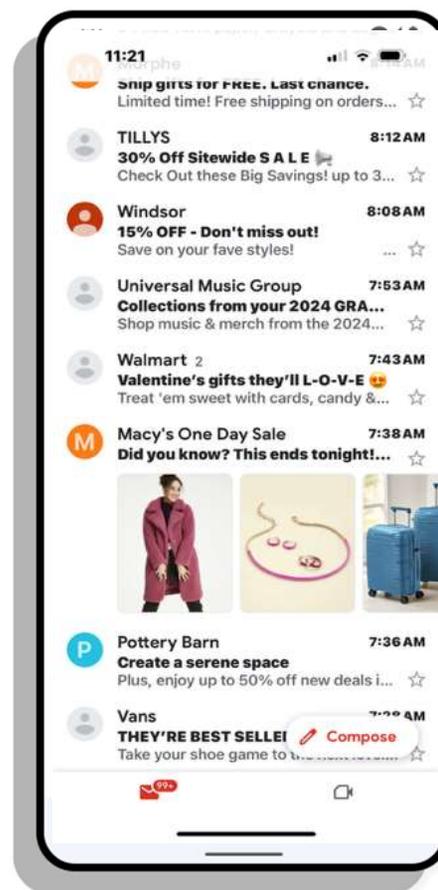
When we tested this in 2020 we included our own unique pixels in the logo and in the hero image so we could track it at the individual level. However individual pixel tracking is no longer allowed due to privacy that Gmail is working to protect for it's users.

Gmail security & privacy limitations:

Other Limitations

- Image urls in **annotations** allow URL parameters, but image URLs **can't be unique.** Adding unique tracking parameters only works in the link to the website ("promo url").

- Make sure your domains are DMARC registered & **all policies are enabled.**

- We have a **density cap** limiting the number of images a user sees in the list of email teasers.

Testing

You can use our test tool at https://developers.google.com/gmail/promotab/preview **to test your annotations.**

-> Sending a marked up promo tab email to one or two recipients to test **won't work.** We have a system that detects whether an email is a **mass email** to avoid spam.
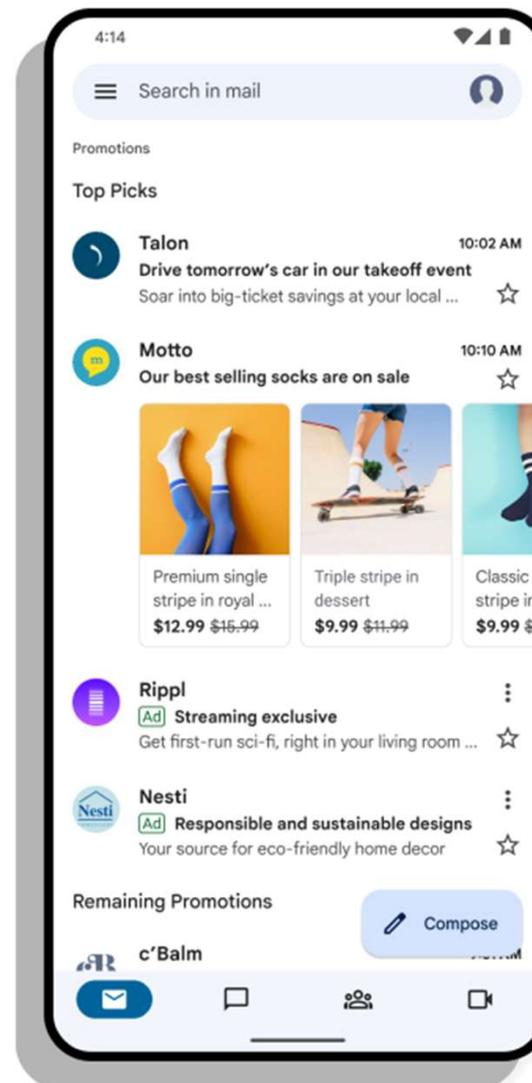
Emails certainly do look "different"

Note: Top Picks and remaining promotions

Notice Sponsored treatment vs. regular Deals annotations treatment is very similar

Use of green font and tags is seemingly arbitrary
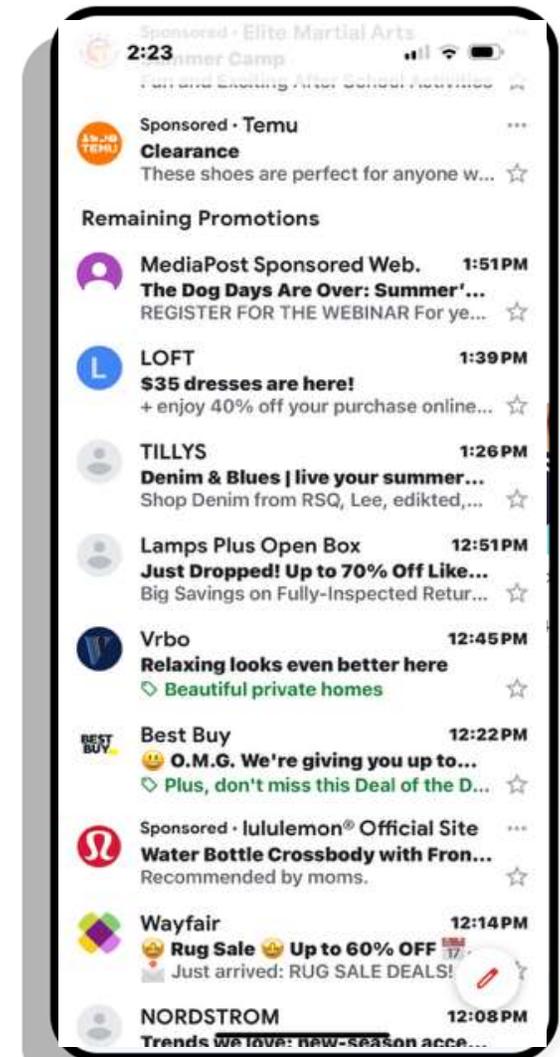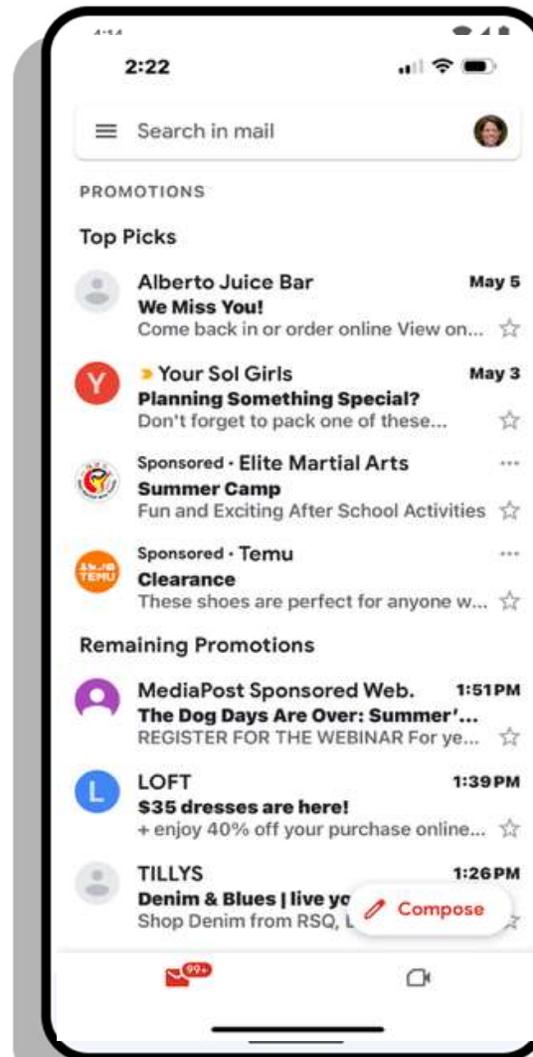
Logo treatment: no rhyme or reason

Treatment of logos:

Looks either too small or just the first
letter initials and random colors
assigned not associated with logo.
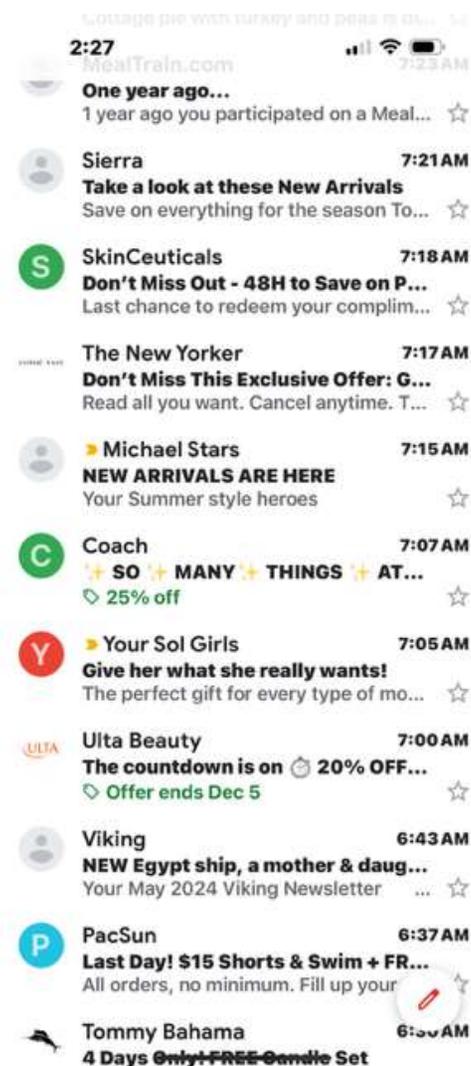
Observations…

An Annotation outside the Top Bundle

One with an Annotation + Ads at the same time.

Objective by Gmail here is to make Gmail annotations look like regular emails so their ads "sponsored" work better for them
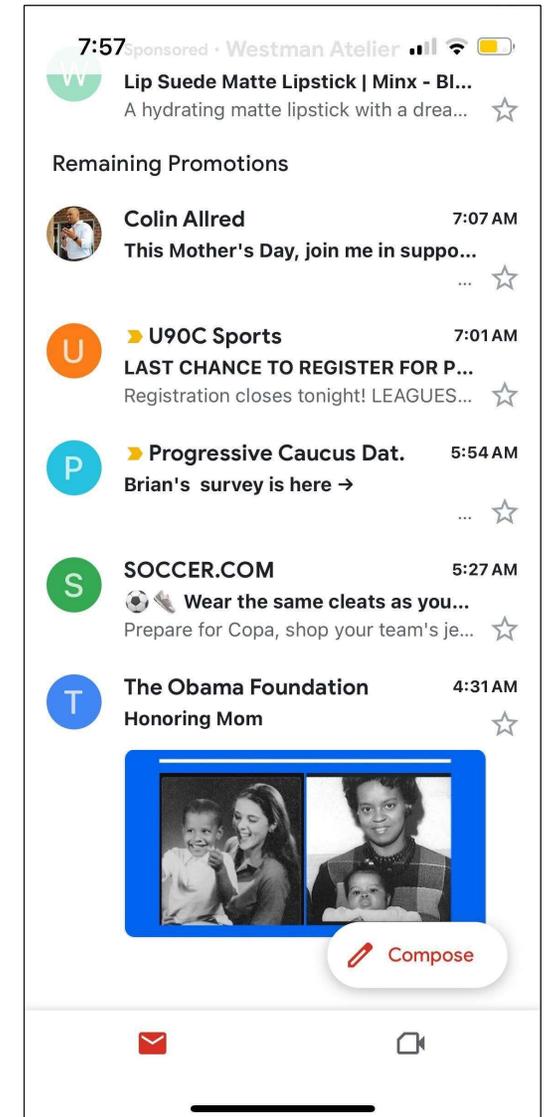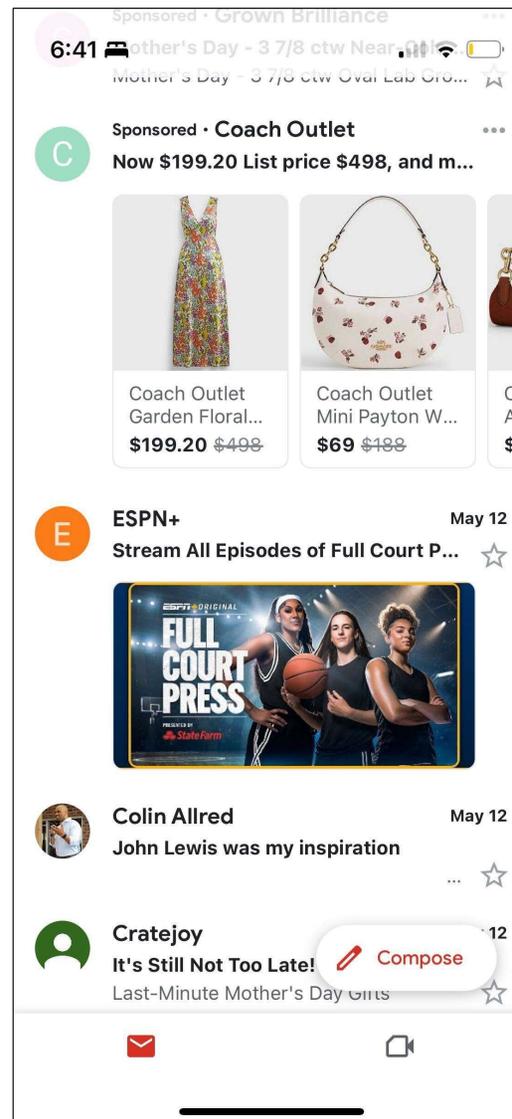
What does this green font indicate?

- Sometimes Gmail forces the green code they Automatic

- Do you find this helpful? If you say "NO" they still do it.

- **Favors the retail vertical only:** for example a green tag has nothing to do with non-profits for example. (what about non-retail…like non-profits) not contextually accurate for other verticals!! Tag shows up 100% of the time. Can't make the tag go away.
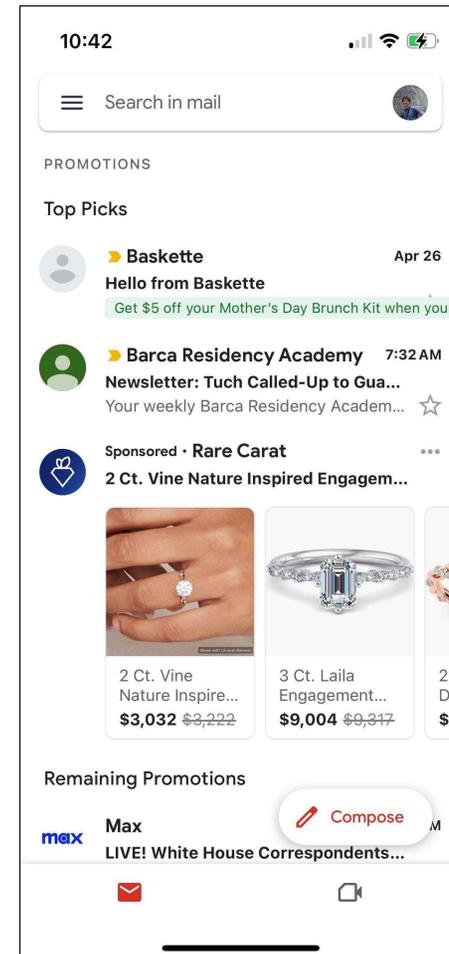
3 biggest challenges – Why do we care?

No testing, no measurement, automatic extractions whether we like it or not.

No way to measure lift	**No way to test it**	**Now forced/automatic extractions** **What's a sender to do?**
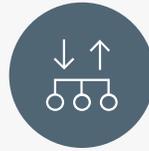
Like it or not ISP's are doing this

Marketers may not have much of a choice...

1. Heather's POV – brands might as well get on board by implementing Annotations/Schema and curate the experience as much as we can.

2. Brian's POV – test it and if you can prove there is a lift with it go for it. Or just let Gmail and Yahoo do what they're doing. You can't track links properly with schema. A lot of people can't track. Very few ESP's can generate unique link tracking and manually operationally impractical.

Overall is there more of an advantage with this or does is undermine strategy

Senders/marketers are looking to scale and prioritize

Which standard will work across Gmail, Yahoo and Microsoft?

Will using schema.org really deliver the results needed for optimized emails in all 3 ISP's?

This sounds good in theory but how does it actually play out and what does it look like?

Email developers and brands need to scale this across all 3 ISP's ideally using the same code.

Senders questions:

What messages are already being scanned and how do they look?

What is the best use case to curate and test?

How do senders know if they're being double billed? Email first and then revenue share Bizrate?

How do senders' better control what is being displayed up above schema?

Are we missing out on email attribution, or can attribution be shared?

Thank you for listening

Questions?

Appendix

Reference to how Yahoo and Hotmail do schema/annotations

Yahoo compiles deals and product images from multiple emails from that brand

Yahoo sometimes uses default images when unable to pull assets from the email
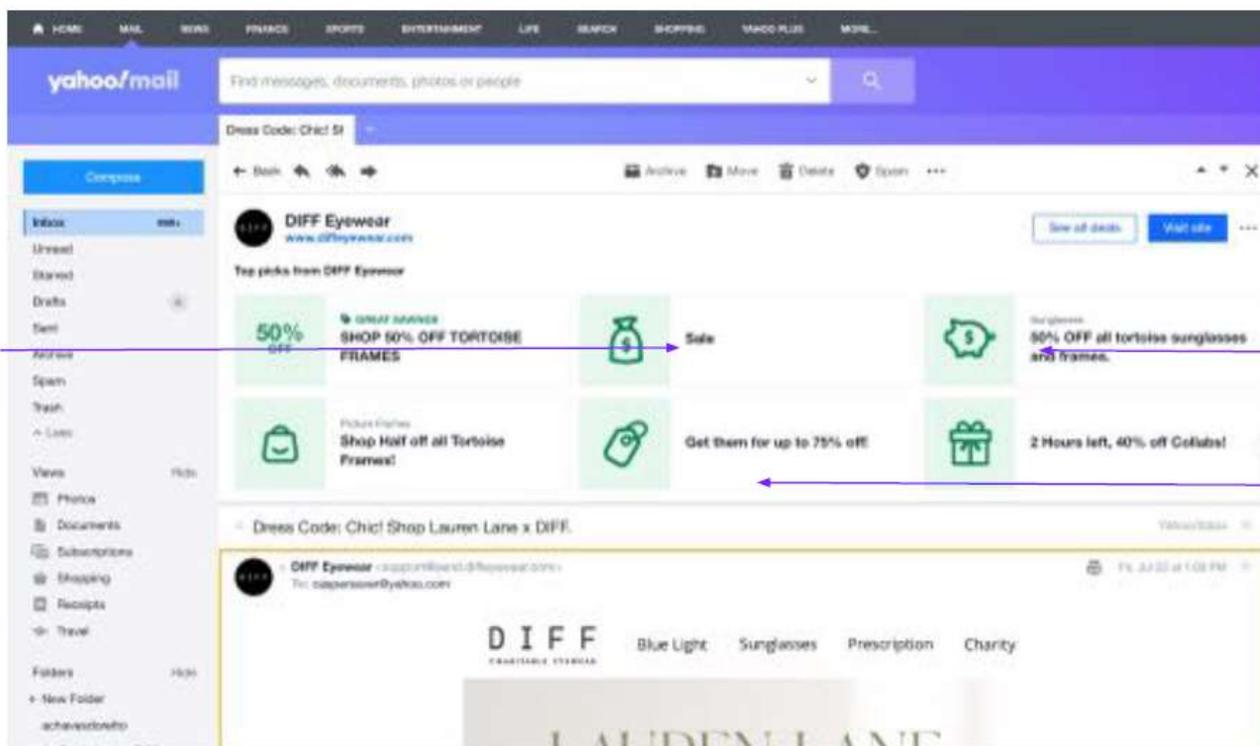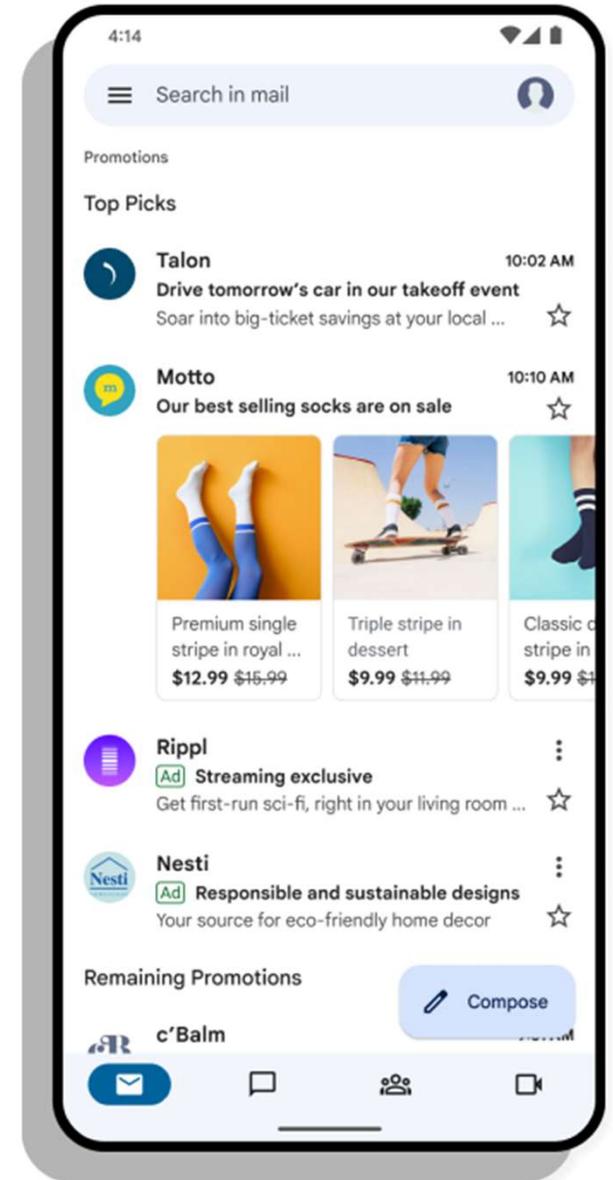

Poor Description

Missing Image

Missing Expiration

Gmail: Email Markup

Gmail currently offers pretty detailed code templates and business use case suggestions called Email MarkUp

Email Markup types:

- Actions

- Orders

- Reservations

- Supported formats

Microsoft: Inbox Shopping

Sample use case: package delivery

Microsoft has pulled the package delivery information from the email and placed it above the email.

Please note: this time the placement of the information is between the subject line and the email itself.

A different approach: users can turn it off and they are transparent about this being a revenue stream for Microsoft