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POV: WILL A NEW PINTEREST-STYLE GMAIL
INCREASE VISIBILITY FOR PHARMA EMAILS?

APRIL 2014



GMAIL TESTS VISUAL UPDATE ON PROMOTIONS TAB

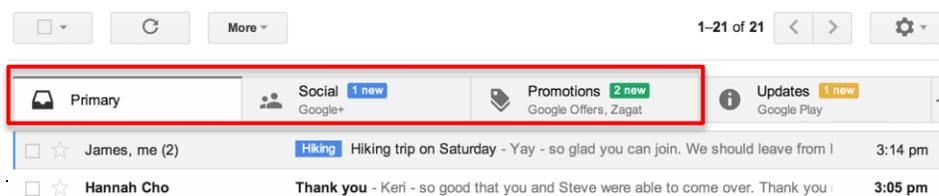
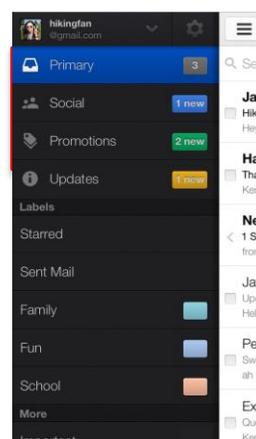
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ten months since Google implemented a new tabbed inbox design for Gmail users, the company has announced a test of a more visually appealing, grid-like version of the Promotions tab.

- The May 2013 introduction of the Promotions tab led marketers to question the discoverability of email promotions in Gmail. Google is now looking to prove to advertisers that there is value in that third tab property.
- The visual update will only be rolled out to a small group of Gmail users who sign up to test the feature, and it isn't expected to impact pharmaceutical companies much in the short-term.
- If the update is well-used by testers and rolled out in earnest, it may lead to a lift in open rates for engaged patients who have opted-in to promotions from pharmaceutical brands. Pharma marketers should be aware of these changes and the potential implications for their email marketing programs.

BACKGROUND

In 2013, Google announced a new Gmail inbox design, which automatically organized inbox content into three main categories: Primary, Social and Promotions. The Primary tab is the default user view, and the other tabs are viewed only when the user clicks to view them. Intouch Solutions covered this change in a [POV blog](#) in September.



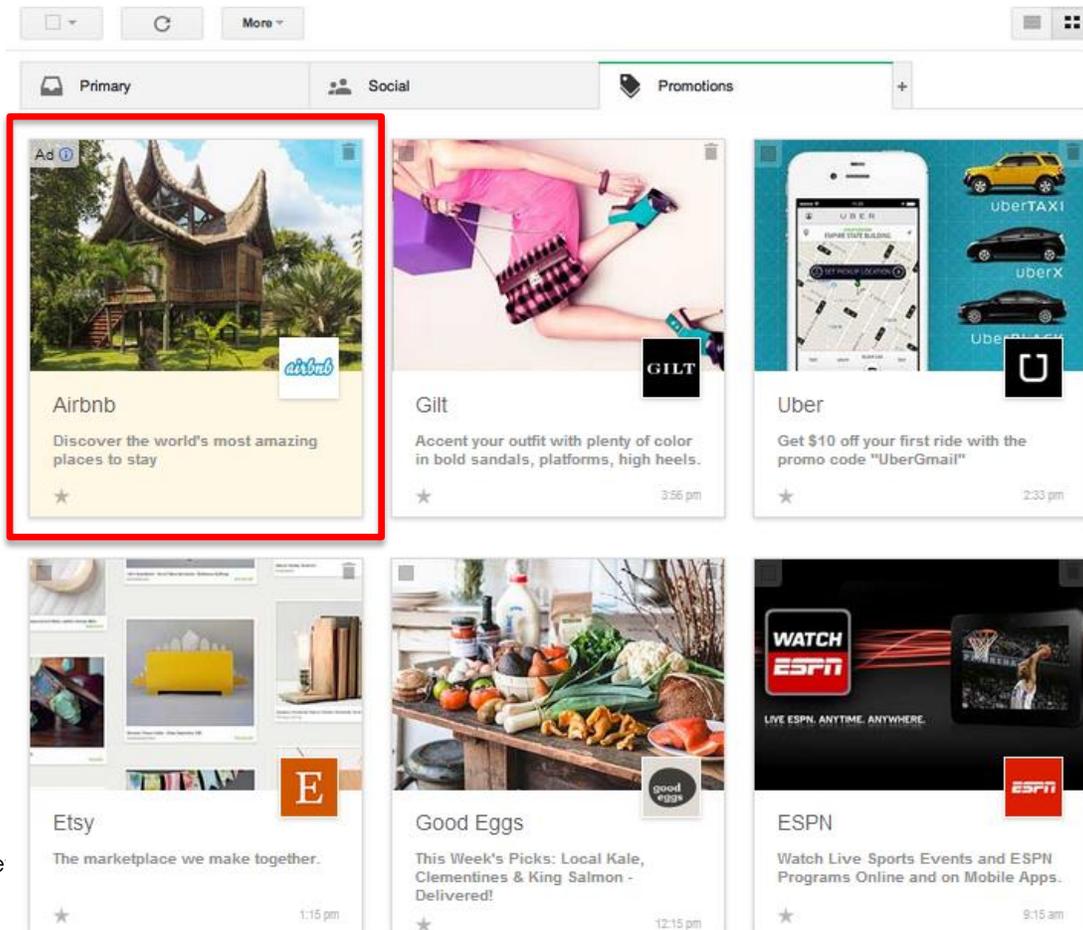


GMAIL VISUAL UPDATE OVERVIEW

Announced on March 25th, the visual update is set to take the Promotions tab a step further, displaying email messages and promoted ad content in a Pinterest-like visual grid with unlimited scrolling. Which image will be displayed? Marketers can include HTML markup within the email design to identify the preferred display image. If markup is not included in the design, Google will utilize a proprietary algorithm to determine which image should be displayed based on its inferred importance.

This update also will associate a sender image, which it will pull from the company's verified Google+ account. This is generally the company logo, but if the sender does not have a verified Google+ account, the first letter of a company name will be displayed in a serif font. There are no changes to the sender name and subject lines.

Promoted advertisements are also included in the grid alongside emails, differentiated only by a yellow background color and a small "Ad" icon in the upper left-hand corner. In the example below, "Airbnb" is a promoted advertisement, and the other images represent emails within the Promotions tab.



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The visual update is now in the testing phase and currently only available on the desktop version of Gmail. Interested users have the option to sign up to test this feature, and Google then selects which users will participate in the program.

EMAIL MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

The **original change** to the tab format was a blow to email marketing. It forced users to actively “favorite” an email before future mailings from that same sender would be delivered to the Primary tab (rather than be relegated to the third Promotions tab). Google’s stated goal was to help users “take control” of their inbox, making it easier to find the messages they want to read. However, it’s clear that this change led to a decrease in clicks on promotional content within Gmail, and Google is now looking to prove to advertisers that there is value in that third tab real estate, positioning the change with the intention of helping users pick out the most relevant deals more easily.

- Gmail represents 10% of opens in the overall email market, though it varies from brand to brand.
- Only a small percentage of Gmail users will view emails using the visual update, as only power users and devotees are likely to sign up to test it.
- Minimal impact is expected for pharmaceutical brands in the short-term. However, if the update is well-used by testers, it is likely to show long-term lifts in open rates for engaged consumers of pharmaceutical brand promotions.





RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BRANDS

The fact that this test is initially limited to only a small population of Gmail users should not deter marketers from beginning to design for maximal open rates among those users and in preparation for future rollout. If users have the option to utilize the visual update, it is our recommendation that we begin to design for it as well. Marketers should keep in mind the following recommendations and considerations:

- As Gmail rolls out this change, email images will become more important. Pharma marketers should ensure that featured images are at least 580 pixels x 400 pixels, and since they will stand alone on the Promotions inbox page, featured images should follow FDA regulations for brand/indication mentions.
- The sending company should consider securing a verified Google+ page with an approved logo if they haven't already done so, since the Google+ logo will be displayed in Gmail as the sender image. Contact Intouch Solutions for help with understanding the risks and benefits of securing a verified Google+ page.
- To avoid truncation, the sender's name should be 20 characters or less and subject lines should be 75 characters or less.
- This will also make it possible for users to "+1" an email, so brands should understand that email content may live outside the email inbox.
- Be aware that any animated GIFs in email will be rendered static in the preview grid.

For more information contact your Intouch Solutions representative.

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