

knak.

Don't be afraid
of the...

dark mode



6 ways to help get you dark mode-ready

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Introduction



Dark mode is a relatively new user preference that has quickly swept the Internet. There are many reasons it has become so popular – it reduces eye strain, makes it easier to read in the dark, and it can even help you sleep better. Some users just prefer the sleeker look.

However, **dark mode** can lead to some tricky problems for marketers. Creating emails for **dark mode** is vastly different than creating them for light mode. It's important to learn about creating emails for **dark mode**, so you can be assured they will render flawlessly every time.

Issues with dark logos, blocks around logos, and font colours that are hard to read, are just the tip of the iceberg. Frankly, some emails just look terrible.

Every email client does **dark mode** a little differently, which means there are a dizzying array of considerations when it comes to ensuring your emails look great, no matter what.

Despite dark mode not being brand new, many designers still struggle with the email conversion of light to dark. This is because when we flip our devices to the dark side of the colour spectrum, almost every colour you see needs to be converted or edited in some way to maintain visibility.

Logo clarity, colour contrasts, and button visibility are some of the most searched prompts for email creators using **dark mode**.

Let's explore some of these main areas that are keeping our marketers up at night with **six ways** to help get you **dark mode-ready**.

1

Prep your logo

Your brand is one of the most important considerations when preparing for dark mode - and it's one that is often overlooked.

Often, company logos will appear in ways that were not intended, and this needs to be prepared for in advance. First, you need to remember that the background behind each of your images will change in **dark mode** - generally from light to dark - though it can depend on your overall colour scheme.

No matter what, if you have a solid background colour baked into your image, it will almost certainly become visible when your email is displayed in **dark mode**.

For example, you may have a logo that looks great on a white background like this:



Fig. 1 The logo looks great in light mode.

However, if the white background is actually baked into the image file, it will become visible in dark mode when the background is adjusted from light to dark.



Fig. 2 In dark mode, any solid white background that is physically part of the image becomes visible.

In some cases, it may be better to make your logo transparent and save it as a transparent PNG. However, if parts of your logo are also dark, this may result in too little contrast:



Fig. 3 Making the logo transparent introduces new problems, because the dark text will now clash with a dark background.

If this is the case for your image, you may need to apply a white background to it in such a way that it looks more intentional in dark mode. You should still save this image as a transparent PNG, but ensure that the white portion is part of the image.



Fig. 4 Adding a graphical white panel behind the logo, and still saving it out as a transparent PNG, means you solve both problems.

The logo will look exactly as it used to in light mode, and the hard edges of your background will only become visible when the background colour changes.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

You can even get creative with this by hiding some details that only become visible when the lights go out by including elements that match your body background in light mode. Once your logo is ready and prepared for dark mode, you will need to move on to the next step - preparing your images.

2

Prep your images

Just as crucial as logo preparations, the same can be said for photos or illustrations with a solid background colour. They might look fine in light mode, but they won't in dark mode.

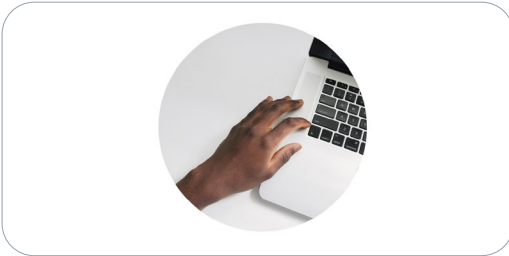


Fig. 7 This image looks great in light mode.

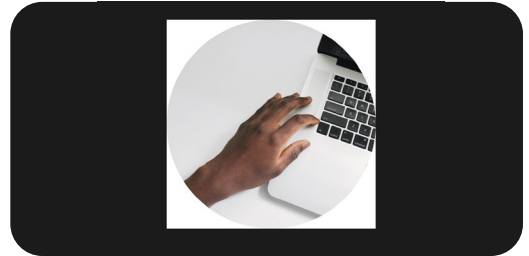


Fig. 8 In dark mode, any solid white background that is physically part of the image becomes visible.

You can either set your image up to be transparent (*below left*), or if that's not possible, then at least try to create a bit of breathing room around the edges of your image. That way it looks more intentional (*below right*).

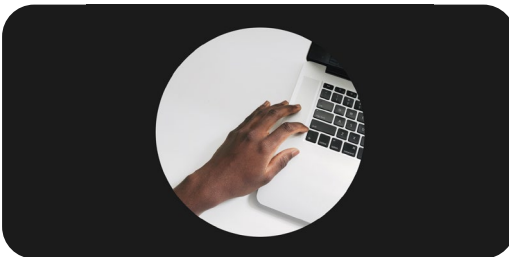


Fig. 9 Making the image transparent solves the issue.

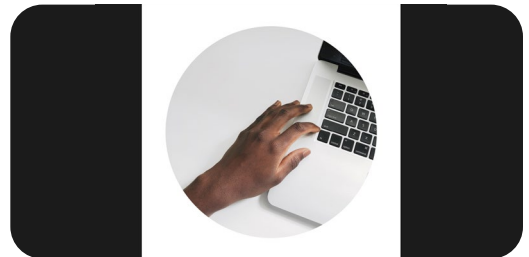


Fig. 10 If you can't create a transparent image, try adding some breathing room around the edges of your design so that it looks more intentional in dark mode.

If any concerns still exist, Knak's Email Testing capability will not only show you the potential issues with your image clarity in dark mode, but Knak's Optimize function will also give you recommendations on ways to fix the problem.

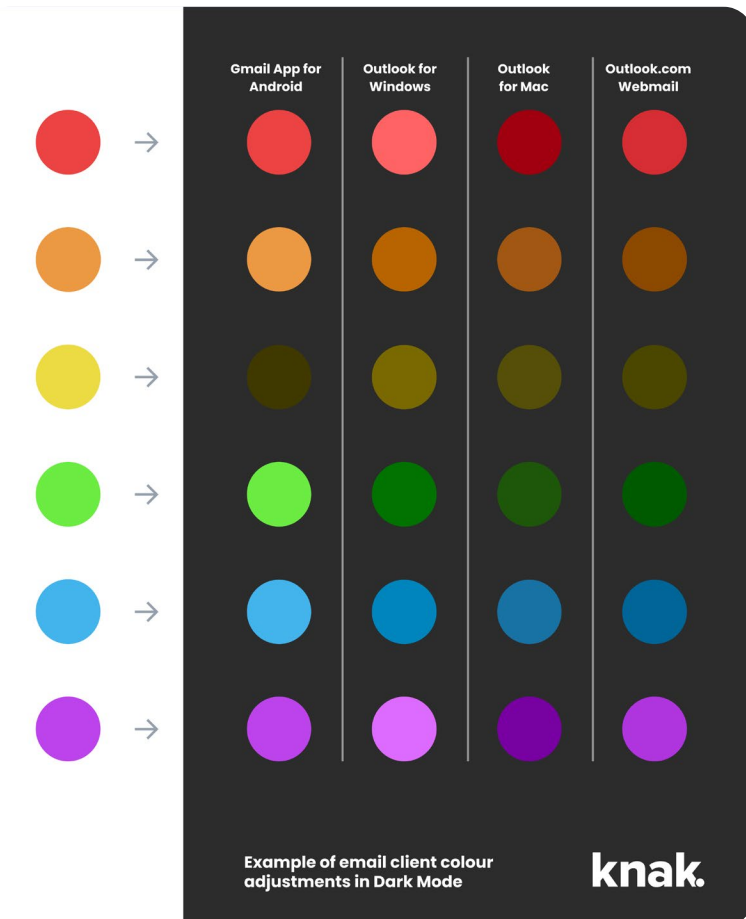
3

Check for colour clashes

Dark mode can make some pretty unpredictable adjustments to colours. Often the brightest and strongest colours are adjusted in the most surprising ways.

Email clients will generally process your colours to make them darker, but in some cases, they actually make them lighter. For example, as you can see below, *Outlook for Windows* actually lightens our shades of red and purple. This is just one of the ways that your colour choices are adjusted in **dark mode**.

Fig. 11





Thankfully, Knak’s new Email Testing feature lets you see how your email looks in different email clients in dark mode. Working around dark mode colour headaches is not a perfect science, but there are a few things you can try if you’re having issues with colours or colour combinations in dark mode.

Neutral text colour on a bold background colour



It’s not as exciting, but using more neutral colours is likely to have more predictable outcomes in **dark mode**.

For example, a WCAG-compliant colour combination of a dark purple background with yellow-green text (*see below*).

In Outlook for Windows in dark mode, the outcome is quite strange. The background is lightened, and the text is darkened:



Fig. 12 The original design (*left*), and the outcome in Outlook for Windows (*right*), in dark mode.

Using a plainer light text colour yields a more readable result in dark mode for Windows:



Fig. 13 The original design (*left*) after we made the text closer to white, and the outcome in Outlook for Windows (*right*) in dark mode, which is much more readable.

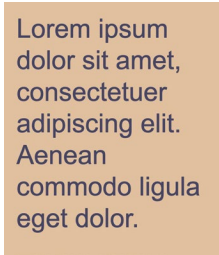
Neutral background colour behind coloured text



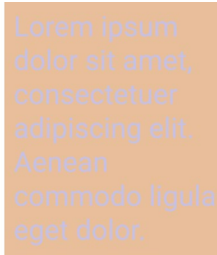
If that doesn't help, it may be better to darken or lighten the background instead.

For example, this colour combination becomes unreadable in the Gmail App for

Android. In this case, we already have quite dark text, so lightening the background is probably a more effective approach:

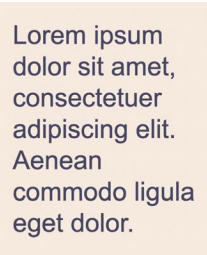


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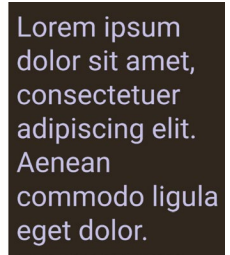


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Fig. 14 In the original design (*left*), and the outcome in the Gmail App for Android (*right*) in dark mode.



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Fig. 15 In the original design (*left*), the image shows a background that is closer to white, and the outcome in the Gmail App for Android (*right*) in dark mode, which is much more readable.



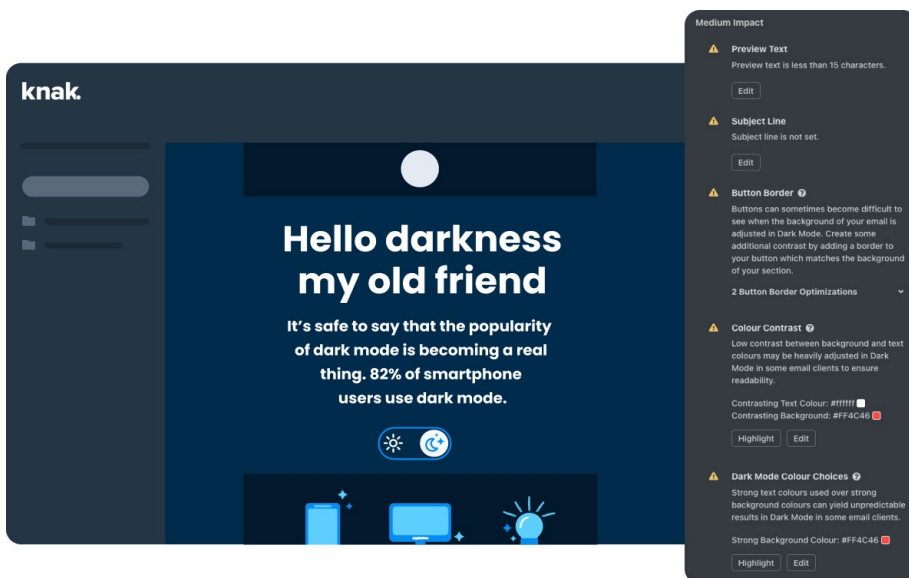
When you're building in Knak, we will provide you with a warning if your colour choice may trigger unusual behaviour in dark mode, or if you are using two colours together that may clash in dark mode.

Just as colour clashes are a concern, colour contrast is also important in both light mode and dark mode. Adequate contrast between your background and your text is necessary so all your subscribers can easily read your emails.

Maintaining good contrast between your text and background in light mode will likely improve your results in **dark mode**.

While it's not a perfect science, email clients tend to aim for a certain level of contrast in **dark mode**, so if your email's colours are inverted but the contrast is poor, your design is likely to undergo even more modification to bring the contrast levels up. Having strong contrast to begin with, will likely help avoid this situation.

When you're building in Knak, our Optimize function will provide you with a warning if any of your email's content does not meet the colour contrast threshold.



The image shows a screenshot of the Knak email editor interface. On the left, there's a dark-themed email preview with the text "Hello darkness my old friend" and "It's safe to say that the popularity of dark mode is becoming a real thing. 82% of smartphone users use dark mode." Below the text are icons for a smartphone, a laptop, and a lightbulb. On the right, a "Medium Impact" warning panel is open, listing several issues: "Preview Text" (less than 15 characters), "Subject Line" (not set), "Button Border" (difficult to see in Dark Mode), and "Colour Contrast" (low contrast between background and text). The "Colour Contrast" warning is highlighted in green, with a green checkmark icon above it. It shows "Contrasting Text Colour: #ffffff" and "Contrasting Background: #FF4C66". Below the preview, there are icons for a smartphone, a laptop, and a lightbulb.

If you use a dark button over a light background, or vice versa, in dark mode this can often result in the background turning dark or light, but the button remains unchanged. When this happens, the button can appear to blend into the background.

One way to improve this situation in some email clients (in particular Outlook for Mac, Outlook for Windows and Outlook.com webmail and smartphone apps) is to add a border around your button which matches the body background of your email.

This border will be invisible in light mode, but (in some email clients) it will remain unchanged in **dark mode**, while the background is adjusted.

This is a quick and easy way to create additional contrast, making your button stand out more in **dark mode**.



Fig. 16 In light mode, both buttons look the same.

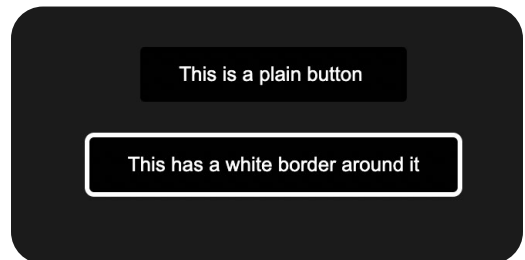


Fig. 17 In dark mode, the border is visible and helps to stop the button from blending into the background.



Knak makes this easy with its Optimize capability by alerting you to any buttons that don't have a border, and allowing you to add a border that matches the background in a single click. In addition, Knak's email testing capability can allow you to preview your emails to ensure they look good on all platforms and clients.

Email clients generally treat borders differently to background colours in dark mode. If you have a white background on your email, and you create a wide border around your content that is also white, in light mode it will simply appear as spacing.

In dark mode, however, many email clients will turn the body background dark, while leaving borders untouched, so you will have a dark background with bright white borders. (As one example, Outlook.com does not adjust borders in dark mode.)

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Fig. 18

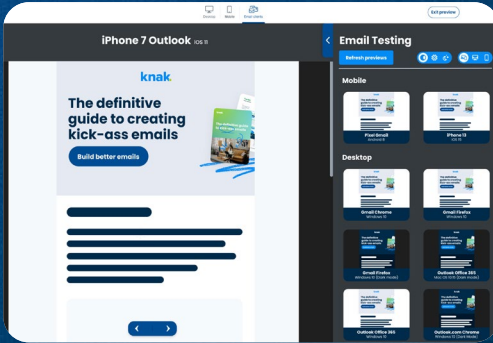
If you have added a border because you wanted to create some space between your elements, then it's always best to add padding instead.

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Fig. 19

When you're building in Knak, we make this easy by alerting you to any borders that match the background colour in light mode, and allow you to easily swap any borders for padding in a single click.



There are a lot of considerations when it comes to building a dark-mode optimized email, but Knak makes marketers lives easy here. We automatically scan your email and provide optimization feedback and the ability to fix it with a single click – no coding required!

Creating emails for dark mode can sometimes seem overwhelming when all aspects of visibility are taken into account. From logos, to text, all the way to the minute details, having a perfect email may not always seem easy. However, we hope this paper sets you on the road to avoiding the few common mistakes that are made when creating content in dark mode.



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