No HTML Coding Experience Necessary!

Creating Professional Looking HTML Messages without Coding

Introduction

In today's world, people do almost everything and anything online, including shopping, banking, researching the latest market trends, keeping in touch with friends, and catching up on current events. Because of this, people are being bombarded with vibrant images, exciting graphics, and stimulating layouts. Think about it, we live in a high-definition, wide-screen world where technology and accessibility rule not only our personal lives but our professional lives as well. Wouldn't it be nice to compete with this and attract more subscribers? Now it's possible! With LISTSERV Maestro's message templates, you can create those visually stimulating messages with eye-catching colors, images, and graphics without any experience with HTML coding.

How Message Templates Work

Creating professional-looking HTML messages without any HTML coding has never been easier! LISTSERV Maestro comes with ready-to-use message templates that contain placeholders that, when selected in the template designer, will let you fill in predefined areas with your own text or images. In addition, all text, including any changes you may make down the road, will be entered into both the HTML and the text part of your message so you only need to enter the text once. Each placeholder can represent one or several instances of plain text or HTML, or a linked or inline binary. When using the template designer, you can also preview each placeholder, providing a full picture of what the template will look like when it is finished.

Defining Message Content Using a Template

Important: Before you can use a template to define a message, the template manager will need to enable it. For further details, please refer to the Message Templates: Creating Templates whitepaper entitled *Do-It-Yourself Templates: Using Your Own Content to Create Message Templates.*

To use a message template for your email message, click on the **Template** icon at the top of the Define Message screen. Clicking this icon opens the Select Content Template screen.
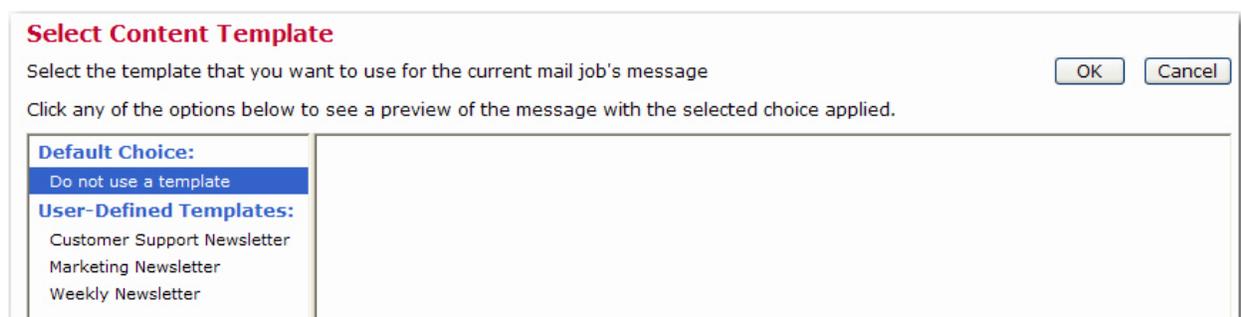
Once you select a template, click **[OK]** to return to the Define Message screen and preview the template.

The biggest advantage to using an existing user-defined template is that the majority of the options and settings that need to be defined for a message are already complete, pre-defined by the person who designed the template. The only work left for you is to "fill in the blanks" that were left in the template in form of special template placeholders.

To fill out the placeholders, select the **Placeholder Values** tab. This tab displays a list of all placeholders in the template on the left and a preview of the message as it appears with the current placeholder values at the right.

In the placeholders lists, any placeholders with no value supplied are marked with the yellow circle arrows ⟳ (these placeholders still require your attention). Placeholders where a value has already been supplied are marked with a green checkmark ✓ . The message as a whole will have the "complete" state only if all placeholders are supplied with a value and are marked with the green checkmark. In addition, any placeholders that are "mandatory" are shown with bold text, while "optional" placeholders are shown with normal text. A mandatory placeholder means that you must supply a non-empty value for this placeholder. For an optional placeholder, you may choose to leave the placeholder empty. However, you will have to do so actively (via the available links, see below), in order for the placeholder to be marked as complete (with the green checkmark).

Finally, the placeholder that is currently selected is marked in the list with a highlighted background. Click on a placeholder in the list to select it.

The message preview pane to the right shows the current message with the current placeholder values already replaced. In the preview, the currently selected placeholder is marked with a highlighted background.

Any placeholders that are still undefined are shown with a suitable dummy text as a stand-in for the yet-to-be-defined actual value so that the preview is more meaningful to you.

You can move the mouse pointer over the preview to see and select placeholders. When the mouse hovers over the value of a placeholder, the placeholder is highlighted and you can click it to select this placeholder.

Below the preview, the current value of the currently selected placeholder is displayed, together with an **Edit** link. Click this link to supply the value for the placeholder.

Note: For an optional placeholder, an additional link with the text **Leave Empty** or **Delete Value** will also appear, allowing you to actively supply an empty value for this placeholder.

When you click the **Edit** link, you are able to edit the value for the placeholder. When editing a placeholder value, your options depend on the type of the placeholder.
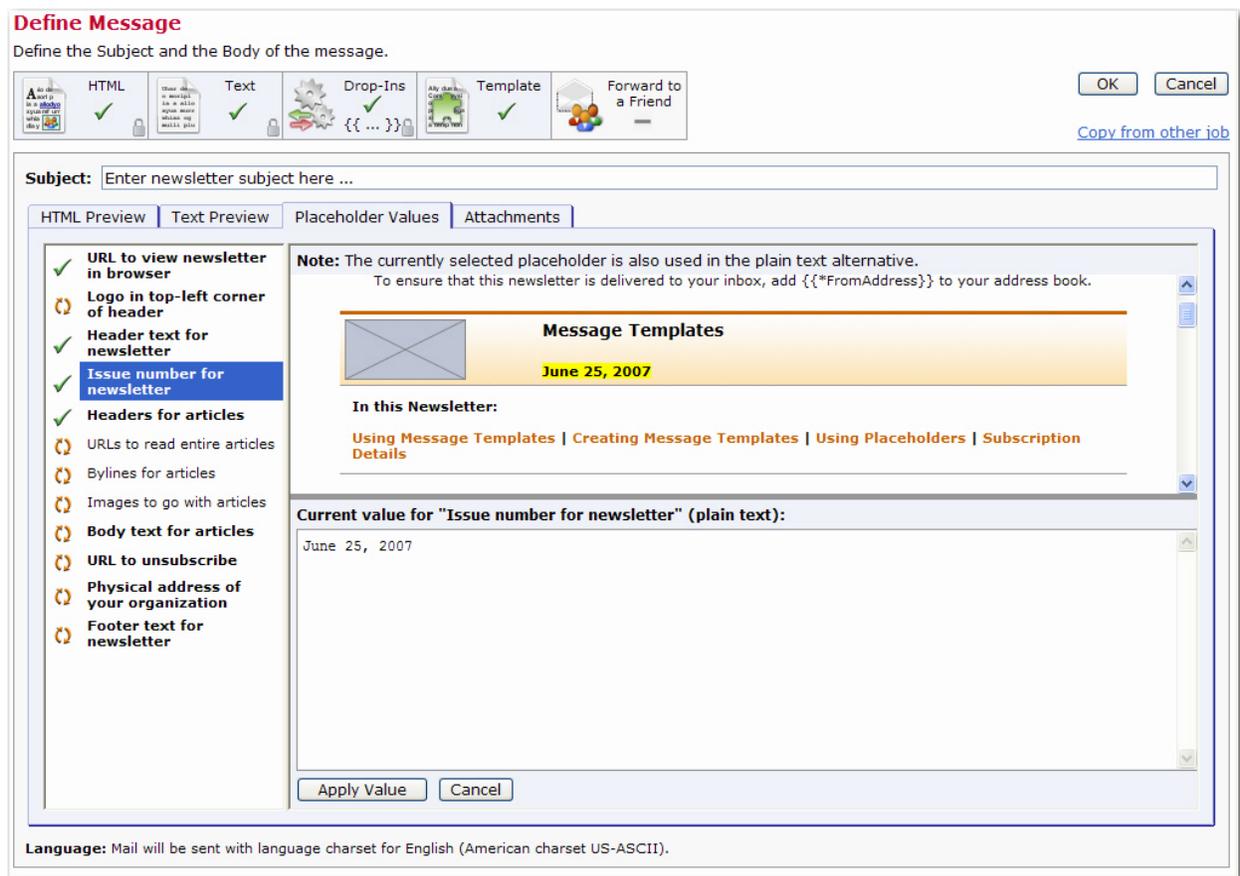
For **single value placeholders**, these options are available:

- **Plain Text**: The text that you type will be interpreted as plain text without any HTML code. If the placeholder is used in the HTML part of a message and the text you type contains any special HTML characters, then those will be HTML-escaped before replacement.

- **HTML**: Placeholders of this type can only be used in the HTML part of a message. The value for such a placeholder may contain HTML code that is not escaped before replacement. This lets you include HTML formatting code in the placeholder value (for example for attributes like underline, bold, color, font etc.), but it also requires that you remember to manually escape any HTML-sensitive characters that are not be supposed to be interpreted as HTML code.

- **Binary**: Placeholders of this type can only be used in the HTML part of a message. The value for such a placeholder will be a URL that points to a binary that is supposed to appear in the message. The kind of binary allowed for a given placeholder is usually made clear by the placeholder name and context. Usually, such binaries are images[1], but can also be background sounds[2]. Depending on how the placeholder was defined, these choices may be available:

  - **Upload an embedded inline binary** – This option allows you to select a binary file from your local computer and upload it into the message definition. The binary file will be bundled together with the message (as a special inline attachment)
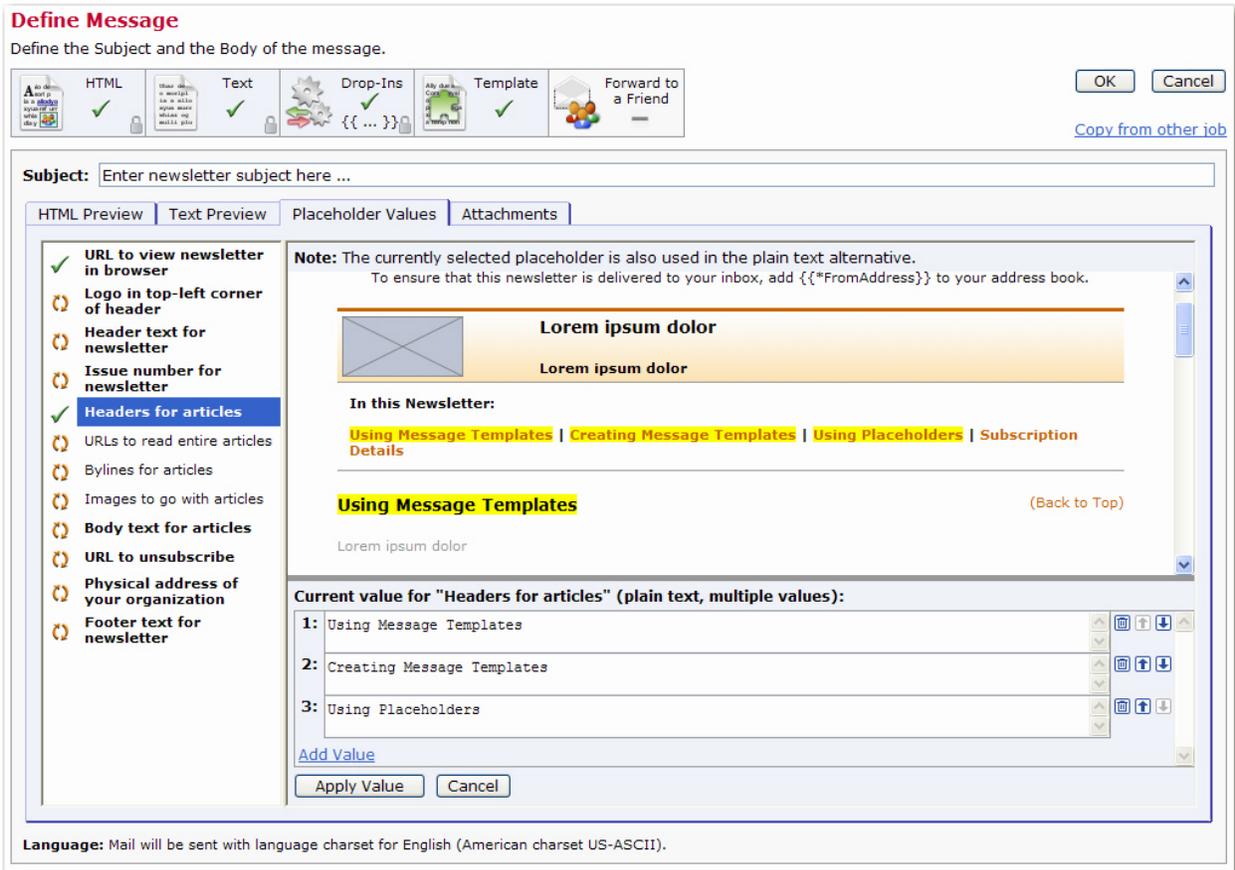
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[1] Only JPEG, GIF, and PNG images are allowed.
[2] Only MIDI-sounds are allowed.

and the placeholder will be replaced with a special URL that references this inline attachment. At the recipient's side, the binary will be viewable even if the recipient is offline or has loading of linked binaries disabled in the email client. However, this option makes the delivered email larger by the size of the binary.

- **Reference a linked binary** – This option allows you to enter a URL. The binary from that URL will not be bundled with the message, but the URL will simply be used to replace the placeholder. At the recipient's side, the binary will then be loaded as a linked resource. The advantage is that the additional binary size will not be added to the delivered message, but the disadvantage is that the URL must be a publicly accessible URL and the binary can only be loaded if the recipient is online when reading the message and the loading of linked binaries has not been disabled.

- **Title input field** – Depending on the placeholder definition, an input field for the **Title** attribute may be available. Usually the value of this field is used to supply the "title" and/or "alt" attribute of the <img> tag that renders the image that is defined by the binary placeholder. In these cases the "title" text will be displayed if the image should not be available (and also for accessibility purposes), and may also become visible as a tool-tip popup that appears when the mouse pointer is hovered over the image. This may vary, however, depending on the placeholder definition. Enter a meaningful "title" value for the binary that you provide.

For **multiple value placeholders**, these options are available:

- **Plain Text, multiple values** – Similar to Plain Text (see above), only you have the option of supplying multiple values for this placeholder. These values will be combined into a list according to the template definition, and then used to replace the placeholder.

- **HTML, multiple values** – Similar as HTML (see above), only you have the option of supplying multiple values for this placeholder. The multiple values will be combined into a list according to the template definition, and then used to replace the placeholder.

- **Binary, multiple values** – Similar as Binary (see above), only you have the option of supplying multiple binaries for this placeholder. The multiple binaries will be combined into a list according to the template definition, and then used to replace the placeholder.

Define Message

Define the Subject and the Body of the message.

HTML ✓ | Text ✓ | Drop-Ins ✓ {{ ... }} | Template ✓ | Forward to a Friend —

OK | Cancel

Copy from other job

Subject: Enter newsletter subject here ...

HTML Preview | Text Preview | Placeholder Values | Attachments

✓ URL to view newsletter in browser
↻ Logo in top-left corner of header
↻ Header text for newsletter
↻ Issue number for newsletter
✓ **Headers for articles**
↻ URLs to read entire articles
↻ Bylines for articles
↻ Images to go with articles
↻ Body text for articles
↻ URL to unsubscribe
↻ Physical address of your organization
↻ Footer text for newsletter

Note: The currently selected placeholder is also used in the plain text alternative.
To ensure that this newsletter is delivered to your inbox, add {{*FromAddress}} to your address book.

Lorem ipsum dolor

Lorem ipsum dolor

In this Newsletter:

Using Message Templates | Creating Message Templates | Using Placeholders | Subscription Details

Using Message Templates (Back to Top)

Lorem ipsum dolor

Current value for "Headers for articles" (plain text, multiple values):

1: Using Message Templates

2: Creating Message Templates

3: Using Placeholders

Add Value

Apply Value | Cancel

Language: Mail will be sent with language charset for English (American charset US-ASCII).

As described above, all values of a multi-value placeholder are usually combined together and the resulting value list is then used to replace the placeholder. As a result, if a template contains several multi-value placeholders after each other, then after replacement you will have several such lists: The first list contains all values of the first multi-value placeholder, followed by the second list with all values of the second multi-value placeholder, followed by the list of values from the third multi-value placeholder, and so on. Such as the following (assuming three multi-value placeholders with four values each):

```
First Value of placeholder 1
Second Value of placeholder 1
Third Value of placeholder 1
Fourth Value of placeholder 1
First Value of placeholder 2
Second Value of placeholder 2
Third Value of placeholder 2
Fourth Value of placeholder 2
First Value of placeholder 3
Second Value of placeholder 3
Third Value of placeholder 3
Fourth Value of placeholder 3
```

However, in some cases, depending on the template definition, multi-value placeholders may behave differently. This is when several multi-value placeholders are grouped together by the template creator in such a way, that their values are being displayed in an alternating fashion, i.e. instead of all values of the first placeholder, followed by all values of the second placeholder, and so on, what you then get is something like this (assuming three grouped multi-value placeholders with four values each):

```
First value of placeholder 1
First value of placeholder 2
First value of placeholder 3
Second value of placeholder 1
Second value of placeholder 2
Second value of placeholder 3
Third value of placeholder 1
Third value of placeholder 2
Third value of placeholder 3
Fourth value of placeholder 1
Fourth value of placeholder 2
Fourth value of placeholder 3
```

In such a case of grouped placeholders, you usually should take care to:

- **Provide the same number of values** for all grouped multi-value placeholders. Otherwise there may be "holes" in the alternating list of values, if one of the multi-value placeholders has fewer values than the others.

- **Use a matching order** for the multiple values of the grouped multi-value placeholders, so that all the first values of all multi-value placeholders correspond to each other, just as all second values should correspond, and so on. Because as you can see from the above example, all the first values will be displayed one after the other, followed by all second values, then all third values, and so on.

Setting a Default Template

To set a default template to use when defining the message content of your email job, click the **Preferences** menu on the Toolbar, select **Mail Jobs**, and then select **Content**. The Content Preference screen opens.

In the **Default Templates** section, click the drop-down menu and select the template to use. This template will be used, by default, in all newly created jobs. If **<None>** is selected, then the newly created job will be created with an empty standard content, either plain text or HTML, depending on the **Default Content Type** setting.

Where to Go From Here

This document has given you the basics on how message templates work and how to define a message using a template. To learn how to create and manage message templates, please see the Message Templates: Creating Templates whitepaper entitled *Do-It-Yourself Templates: Using Your Own Content to Create Message Templates*.

To learn more advanced techniques, including how to create customized HTML templates and how to create and edit placeholders, please see the Message Templates: Advanced Techniques whitepaper entitled *Going Above and Beyond: Using Advanced Techniques to Create Customized HTML Templates*.

References

LISTSERV Maestro User's Manual

http://www.lsoft.com/resources/manuals.asp

Message Templates: Creating Templates whitepaper entitled *Do-It-Yourself Templates: Using Your Own Content to Create Message Templates*

The Message Templates: Advanced Techniques whitepaper entitled *Going Above and Beyond: Using Advanced Techniques to Create Customized HTML Templates*

http://www.lsoft.com/resources/whitepaper.asp