

How to tell if someone reads your HTML newsletter or ezine

By Eric Koshinsky

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<http://www.newbie-guides.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=9>

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Title: How to tell if someone opens your HTML newsletter:

The ants come marching 1x1 - Hurrah!

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There is no real way to know exactly how many times your newsletters are read. There is a neat little 'trick' you can use with HTML based newsletters and email so that you can know at least how many times it has been viewed. Compare the number of views the number of copies sent out and you will have a reasonably good idea of how well read your newsletter is. With HTML newsletters and email messages it is possible to tell if the message has been opened.

It all sounds reasonably simple, and actually it really is quite easy. All you need to do is:

- 1) create a simple 1x1 clear .gif image.
- 2) Upload the image to your webserver so it is on the internet.
- 3) Insert the image at the head of your newsletter/email.
- 4) Mail out your newsletter/email to your mailing list.

Now, when a reader opens your newsletter, the invisible image is loaded, your server's webstats record the hit, and presto, you know how many times your newsletter has been opened.

In a bit more detail.

Create the 1x1.gif file. To do this, any basic image editor will do. Simply create a new .gif image that is 1 pixel X 1 pixel with a transparent background. Jasc software's Paintshop pro is a great and cheap image editor for PC's, and graphicConverter is a great one for Mac. Don't worry, if this seems to be too much of a bother, you can you can simply download the image at the [newbie-guides.com](http://www.newbie-guides.com) download directory. Simply search for 'clear-image'. Save it in a place that is easy to remember. The 1x1 image is invisible when opened!

Upload the image to your webserver

Use whatever ftp (file transfer protocol) software you like and simply upload the file to your images directory. I normally make a special directory only for these images. This way my counter images are in a folder /images/counters/ to keep them separate from the other images - it just helps keep things more manageable.

Insert the image into your newsletter.

Please note that because many article publication newsletters do not allow HTML in the article text, I have placed the different elements on separate lines. Simply make each HTML statement into a single line should you wish to use it.

This is quite straight forward. Just insert the HTML statement:

```
img src="http://www.mydomain.com/images/counters/my-1x1.gif"
```

at the start of your newsletter, just after the body tag.

Of course, if you are using some wysiwyg editor like FrontPage, be sure to insert the image from your webserver, and NOT from your local hard drive!!

Mail out your newsletter as usual.

It is important to keep in mind that you will need to give the my-1x1.gif file a different name every time you send out your newsletter. This way your webstats will track each newsletter separately. For example if you send out your newsletter twice a month, you might name the counter images: JAN-counter-A.gif and JAN-counter-B.gif for each of the mailings. NOTE: Don't delete the first one, simply copy it and give it a new name for the next mailing. That way the original image will keep recording hits for you!

So, simply duplicate the file, and then rename the file on your server as well as the HTML code in your newsletter. This means you will end up with something like this (inside the 'images/counters' directory on your webserver):

```
JAN-counter-A.gif  
JAN-counter-B.gif  
FEB-counter-A.gif  
FEB-counter-B.gif
```

In your newsletter the HTML code would be something like:

```
img src="http://www.mydomain.com/counters/JAN-counter-A.gif"
```

in your first January mailing and...

img src="http://www.mydomain.com/counters/JAN-counter-B.gif"

in your second January mailing..

If you are worried that all these images will consume all your webspace - DON'T. A typical 1x1.gif uses about 1k of disk space. Not really something to be overly concerned about!!

Now what you will need to do is check your web server stats to see how many times your image has been 'hit'. Every time an image is loaded through your webserver, it is recorded as a hit. Look to see how many times it has been 'hit' and you know how many times your newsletter has been read!

Just how do you check your webstats? Well I've written another article that explains webstats in more detail, but basically, your webhost package will provide you with all that stats, and a program that will analyze them for you. Two of the most common stat's packages are awstats, and webalyzer. Any reputable webhost will have one (or both) of these installed as part of your hosting package. Simply log into your hosting administration account (which is also where you create email accounts etc.) and use the stat's package they have installed.

You will be looking to find your 1x1.gif (whatever you named it). Every stats package displays information a little differently, so you will have to look a little to find your information. Most commonly you will look for something like:

- Top URL,
- Most Requested Files,
- File hits

Once you find the information, you can check it against your mail out numbers and have a much better idea of how well you are reaching your subscribers and clients.

If you are an astute reader, and I'm sure you are, you'll already know that there are some problems with this technique. As with most things in life, it isn't perfect. The chief problem is one that simply can't be solved, by any technique! That problem is simply that just because your newsletter/email is opened doesn't mean that the reader actually reads your newsletter very carefully - or at all! But then again, there is NO WAY to ensure that someone reads your newsletter - although having a totally skookum newsletter that people want to read certainly helps!

A second problem is that some people, very foolishly, have their email program's 'auto-preview' window pane open all the

time. This means that as soon as they click on a message (even if only to delete it), it is displayed at the bottom of their screen. This still records a 'hit' in your webstats, but may not have any real meaning. A 'false-positive' as they say.

The final dilemma is that this won't work with text only email messages and newsletters. The whole concept depends on the image being 'pulled' from your webserver when someone opens the newsletter. This simply doesn't happen with plain text newsletters. Sorry 'bout that!

There is no truly perfect way to know how many people are reading your newsletter as it is sent out. But using this very simple technique you can have a much better idea of how many are being at least opened (and hopefully read) as opposed to simply being deleted or filtered out as spam.

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