Custom Video Thumbnails

My Videos · https://coreel.ai/help/custom-video-thumbnails/

The thumbnail is the first thing a recipient sees in their inbox — often before they've read your subject line. A good thumbnail (a friendly face, a clear smile, a moment of motion in the animated GIF preview) dramatically increases open rates.

This article covers how to choose the right frame, customize the overlay text, and tune your thumbnails for higher engagement.

How thumbnails work

When you record a video, coReel automatically generates two artifacts for the inbox preview:

- **A static thumbnail (PNG/JPG)** — a still frame from your video, used in email clients that don't support animation.
- **An animated GIF preview** — a short clip from your video that auto-plays inside Gmail, Outlook, and other email clients that support animation.

Both are embedded into your email so the recipient sees a video-like preview rather than a generic file icon. They click the preview → land on your watch page → see the full video.

You can customize both: which frame to use, and what text overlay (if any) sits on top.

Choosing a thumbnail frame

By default, coReel picks a frame from a few seconds into your video. But you can pick any frame manually:

1. After recording (or upload), open the video in **My Videos**.
2. Click **Edit Thumbnail** (or look for a thumbnail-icon button next to the video).
3. A scrubber appears showing frames across the timeline.

4. Drag the scrubber to the frame you want.
5. Click **Use this frame**.
6. Save.

Tips for picking a frame:

- **Pick a face with eye contact.** Looking at the camera beats looking away every time.
- **Smile or open mouth (mid-word) reads as motion.** A frozen-smile thumbnail can look stiff; a mid-talk frame reads as a real person mid-sentence.
- **Avoid frames where you're blurry or in motion blur.** Crisp is good.
- **Avoid awkward facial expressions.** The thumbnail is your subject line in image form — it sets a tone.

Customizing the GIF preview

The animated GIF is a short clip from your video used as the inbox preview. By default, coReel picks the opening few seconds. You can change this:

1. In **My Videos**, open the video.
2. Click **Edit GIF Preview**.
3. Drag the **start point** and **end point** of the GIF range on the timeline scrubber.
4. Preview the result inline.
5. Save.

Tips for the GIF preview:

- **Pick a moment of visible motion.** A waving hand, a head turn, a smile forming. Motion attracts attention in the inbox far more than a still image.
- **Keep it short.** 2-4 seconds is the sweet spot. Longer GIFs feel chunky and load slower.
- **Open with you in frame.** If your video starts with a static title card or a moment where you're off-screen, jump past that.

Adding text overlay to the thumbnail

You can overlay short text on top of the thumbnail — usually the recipient's first name, which feels intensely personal in the inbox.

1. In **My Videos**, open the video.
2. Click **Edit Thumbnail**.
3. In the **Overlay text** field, type the text you want.
4. Pick a **position** (top, center, bottom) and **color** that contrasts with your selected frame.
5. Save.

Common overlay patterns:

- **First name** — "Hi Sarah" or just "Sarah"
- **Company name** — "For Acme" or "Acme"
- **A short question** — "Got 60 seconds?"

For best results, keep overlay text short — 1-3 words. Long overlays compete with the video itself.

Personalized thumbnails per recipient

If you're sending to multiple recipients, you can have the overlay text **personalize automatically** per recipient — so each person sees their own name on the thumbnail.

1. In the overlay text field, use a merge token like `{firstName}`.
2. When the email goes out, the system replaces the token with the recipient's first name from your CRM or recipient field.

Available merge tokens vary by provider — `{firstName}`, `{lastName}`, `{company}` are typically supported when CRM contacts are used.

How thumbnails look in different email clients

Email clients vary in what they render:

- **Gmail** — shows the animated GIF in most cases. Falls back to the static thumbnail if the GIF doesn't load.
- **Outlook (modern)** — shows the static thumbnail. Older Outlook versions may not animate.
- **Apple Mail** — shows the animated GIF on most platforms.
- **Mobile clients** — typically show the static thumbnail to save bandwidth, but increasingly support GIFs.

Always make sure your static thumbnail is strong on its own — assume animation may not play.

Replacing or regenerating thumbnails

If you change your mind, you can always go back to **Edit Thumbnail** and pick a new frame or update overlay text. Changes apply immediately. Past sends keep the thumbnail they had at send time.

If you want to **regenerate the auto-thumbnail from scratch**, click **Reset to auto** in the thumbnail editor.

Custom uploaded thumbnails

If frame-picker doesn't give you what you want, you can **upload a custom image** as the thumbnail entirely:

1. In the thumbnail editor, click **Upload custom image**.
2. Pick a PNG or JPG from your computer (recommended: 1280×720 or similar 16:9 aspect ratio).
3. Save.

Custom uploads replace the frame-pick. Use this for branded title cards, screenshots, or thumbnails you've designed in a tool like Canva.

Troubleshooting

My thumbnail doesn't update in already-sent emails. Thumbnails are embedded at send time. Sends that have already gone out keep the thumbnail they were sent with. Changes apply only to

future sends.

The overlay text is hard to read. Try a higher-contrast color (white text on a dark frame, black on a light frame). Some thumbnail editors also support a subtle drop shadow for legibility — check the options panel.

My GIF preview is huge and loads slowly. Shorten the GIF range (2-3 seconds is plenty) and re-save. Smaller GIFs load faster and don't get clipped by email clients.

Recipients see a generic icon, not my thumbnail. This is almost always an email-client image-blocking setting. The recipient can click "Show images" or whitelist your email address to make thumbnails appear. There's no way to force display from the sender side.

The merge token `{firstName}` showed up literally as `{firstName}` in the thumbnail. The recipient didn't have a first name in the CRM record, so the token didn't merge. Either set up a fallback in your CRM, or use a non-personalized overlay.