

10+ Ways to Increase Response to Your Email Marketing Messages

Writing a great email message is not the same “formula” (what to say and emphasize, what goes where, etc.) as that used for hard copy letters. The following highlights the most important to-dos.

The “FROM”

Unless it’s going to people who would recognize your name, use your school name. Keep in mind that depending on the recipient’s settings and screen or pane width, it may be truncated. So use what is most recognizable first. Examples:

UF, College of Business
OSU, Professional Studies

If it has to be “From” a person, use a female. Then indicate your school in the subject line.

The “SUBJECT” Line:

Use your school name if you did not use it in the “From.” Be specific on the content in the subject line. Don’t be clever. Be clear.

9 Upcoming HR Evening Courses in 2009
Jan. to June, 2009, Catalog of Professional Programs
10 New IT Certification Programs
Stephen Covey, In-person, On-Campus

I have tested different subject lines. And the impact is well worth the time. The subject line alone can double and triple the open rates. And until your message is opened, it’s on its way to the trash folder.

Links in the Message

1) When it opens (if the recipient chooses to do so, a BIG IF) make sure your school name and logo is at the top. Go for immediate and full credibility, even if it was in the From or the Subject line.

2) Next thing you would see on your screen could be the person’s name “Dear Phil:”, if you have names in your data files and use a software email web service (like Constant Contact) that enables you to personalize. Even if you don’t have 100% names, the software can default to greetings like “Dear Colleague,”

3) Use 3-4 Links

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- Very close to the top, show the reader what to click on to take the primary action you want: “Get full course details and register here. “
- Give a secondary link that they can go to if they want more info on something else, like “Get the full 2009 calendar.”
- Offer another link (“See and download the full brochure here.”) that they can use to download a full pdf, including more info and registration details.

What to Write and Say in Your Message:

What to actually write and say in your message requires a different mindset than hard copy-copy writing, since there are so many variables that influence the process. And unlike a brochure or catalog, but more akin to a postcard, your email message is just step 1 (of 2, 3, or 4) of the sale. You are driving them to follow a link, find and read the information, make a decision and then register (or take whatever the final action is that you want them to take.)

Write and design your message with that clearly in mind: What is the next step you want them to take? There are exceptions to the step 1 of 4, such as emails announcing webinars and teleconferences. For these programs your message is the “brochure.” The action is for them to register.

HTML Messages that Are Graphic Intensive:

Unless you are using a web-based service with templates you can customize, you need to be proficient with Dreamweaver. Or have someone who is. It’s an art and skill in and of itself. And if you intend to rent email lists, and send html messages, you will need the capability. (See my Pros & Cons of Renting Email Lists for Executive and Professional Programs.) There are very few words, as in no more than 50, in a graphic intensive html message. But you can announce several programs, provide links to your brochures and catalog, create on-site inquiries. Your options are endless, and you are creating options for action. Providing something for everyone.

HTML Text Look-Alike Messages:

Some messages appear to be text with a logo at the top. They are actually html with limited graphics. This type of message works best for very specific offers. Don’t try to sell 10 different programs. You will want to use 6-8 paragraphs with only 1-2 sentences each. Maybe insert 3-4 bullets to highlight benefits and takeaways.

Pure Text Messages:

In most cases, when you rent an email list, the list owner or list manager will also want a text copy of the message, usually in Notepad. Text and links, but no graphics. Reason is – many opt-in email subscribers have said “yes” to receiving offers and announcements, but they do not want to receive any HTML. Only text. So the copy is no different than the Look-Alikes above.

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Refer a Colleague or Forward to a Friend:

Be sure to ask recipients to do this, and even provide an easy way to do so.

“You can have any of these programs conducted on-site.”

Say it. Make it obvious. Make it easy. “Call or email Phil Graf now at 941-921-6961 or pgraf@proed.com”

Words NOT to Use in Your Emails:

Save ... Free ... Discount ... and many others that you can imagine.

The spamware – Norton, MacAfee, AVP and others – will rate incoming emails and route them to spam folders, depending on how the recipient has set their preferences. Too many of the wrong words and your email message is junk for certain. Some web-based email services offer spam checks that you can run on your message while it is still in the draft stages.

Follow-up on the Clickthroughs:

Most mass blast software enables you to identify and easily email everyone who clicks through on a link. It makes follow-up on qualified leads a breeze.

Test Your Message.

Load your in-house list in A/B segments. If you have 2,000 emails, sort them alpha by first letter of the last name. Call the first 1,000 A and the second 1,000 B. Send the same message to both at the same time but with a different subject line. Or same subject line and different message. Test test test.

Do this especially if you are considering renting an email list. Find out what works best for Subject Line before investing big \$ in email rentals. (See my Pros & Cons of Renting Email Lists.)

Schedule Your Blasts with Forethought.

For those of you who have been to my workshops, you know I emphasize and emphasize “seeing your reader.” From copy and lists to graphics and timing, it’s critical.

“If you want to be sure that Pat Miller buys, you have to see Pat Miller through Pat Miller’s eyes.”

Who is your primary audience? Is Pat receiving your email at home or business? Does Pat spend much of the day on the computer or the production floor, at a construction site or in a lab, at an office at home or on the road serving clients? Think about it. Then decide what might be the best time to blast.

Generally you will avoid mass blasts on Monday am and Friday pm no matter what.

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Open and Click Through Rates:

Open rates are expressed as a percentage of the number emailed. A 20% open rate means 200 of your 1,000 emails were actually opened or previewed. The percentage of recipients who actually read your message will be much less.

Click through rates are a percentage of the quantity opened, not of the number of emails sent. An open rate of 10% would be 20 if 200 were opened.

Bounce Rates:

10% plus is common. If you are renting an email list, you won't see this number. But if you are emailing your in-house list, you should be able to see Bounces (undeliverable, mail box full, bad addresses), as well as open rates and clickthroughs with specifics for each URL link you had in your email.

Be careful of doing "mass" blasts (large email broadcasts) from your Outlook or Eudora on your internal mail server. Only do large blasts with web based services that enable you to read and see the full results after 24-48 hours.

In Summary:

Email strategies, when applied to your in-house list, have extraordinarily high potential and at a low cost and risk. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said when sending to rented email lists. Venture into the rental arena with caution and due diligence.

If you are confident that you are ready to test rented email and want to determine if there are targeted rental email lists available for your program offers, please contact us.

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