



BEST PRACTICES : EMAIL MARKETING

DIGITAL STRATEGY & ENGAGEMENT | ALUMNI RELATIONS

1. AUDIENCE

Small, engaged lists have much higher open and click-through rates.

Large, non-targeted lists are more likely to result in unsubscribes; once a constituent unsubscribes, the chance to engage with them with other opportunities is lost.

2. SUBJECT LINES

Length

The general rule of thumb in email marketing is to keep your subject line to 50 characters or less. The exception is for highly targeted audiences, where the recipient expects additional information in the subject line.

Localization

Personalization, such as including a recipient's first name or last name, doesn't significantly improve open rates. Providing localization, such as including a city name, does help.

Three Words to Avoid

Email marketers are familiar with words such as "free" which are generally to be avoided in emails since they tend to trigger spam filters. However, there are three innocuous words that won't trigger a spam filter, but will negatively affect open rates. They are: Help, Percent off, and Reminder.

From & Subject Lines

Avoid duplicating information in the From field and the Subject line. This allows your subject line to include more substantive information. For instance, instead of:

From: GWSB Alumni Relations
Subject: GWSB invites you to attend...

Try:

From: GWSB Alumni Relations
Subject: You're invited to attend...

3. CONTENT

Every email should have one purpose / call to action, referenced in the subject line and made clear within the first paragraph of the email's body. This can be a call to action such as an event registration or donation appeal. Even an email with the purpose of providing information, such as a newsletter, should have a primary action the recipient can take.

Length

Keep emails as short and to the point as possible. With many of our emails being viewed on mobile devices, brevity is key. Messages should display vertically; avoid the need to "side scroll."

4. LINKS

Length

The highest performing links are usually 5-7 words in length and descriptive of where the click will take the user. 'Click here' links do not perform as well, and make it more difficult to track performance.

Limit number of unique links

Links that lead to sites other than your primary action page may distract the reader from following through on the desired action. If you would like to include additional links (e.g., a venue's website), consider putting them on the click-through page instead of in the email.

Include a button

Including a graphic that resembles a button has been shown to increase conversion rates.

Offer value with a click

It takes a user effort to click on a link; if you don't deliver what you say, they will not click again or click in the next email.

5. IMAGES

Do not use images to convey your message.

Reports show that 60–70% of recipients initially block images in emails. While a dynamic image might look great, if it is not being seen, it is inhibiting your response. Images should enhance text but contain no critical information. Do not make an image of a print invitation or solicitation and copy it into the email to be sent.

Avoid image-top-heavy emails. If an image is initially blocked, then the readers first few seconds are spent scrolling instead of looking at valuable information.

Images can also trigger a higher spam score and lead to your email not reaching the recipient at all.

6. GRAMMAR AND CAPITALIZATION

Follow standard rules. Email communications do not need to be as formal as print, but be professional. GW has a style guide which can be found on DAR Connect under Marketing Communications.

7. PLAIN TEXT

There are still people that prefer plain-text emails.

Spam filters can be triggered if a plain-text alternative is not accompanied with an HTML email. Also, the plain-text email should be roughly the same content as the HTML email

Not all mobile devices display HTML properly. Some of them only display the text portion of HTML. Some of them only display plain-text. Play it safe and make your plain-text back up message.

In plain-text emails, you can't mask hyperlinks. (e.g., "Click here to RSVP"). Instead, be sure your hyperlinks work with the text, (e.g., "RSVP via: <http://www.gwu.edu/event>") and the user will see it.

8. VARIANTS & A/B TESTING

Variants and A/B Testing can be used to test certain aspects of a message (e.g., subject line, time of day, etc.) on a small percentage of the audience. Two versions of an email are sent prior to the schedule date of the email, and the most successful version of the test messages is then sent to the remainder of the audience. Please contact your email sender for assistance with this feature.

9. CONDITIONAL FORMATTING

Conditional formatting customizes one email to the individual viewer. For instance, an email can be sent to a large audience (e.g., CCAS alumni), but portions of the email can vary depending on a constituent's group status (e.g, Political Science alumni see one thing, Art Therapy alumni another).

GW has the capability to use conditional formatting. Please contact your email sender for assistance with this feature.

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