



Maximizing Your Email Marketing Results

By: Rich Finstein, CEO, CommPartners

Email has become the predominant communication and promotional vehicle for small businesses, and it's growing in popularity with associations and non-profits. And for good reason. In today's tough budget environment, many organizations have adopted email as their medium of choice because the cost per message is approximately one-tenth of direct mail.

With email, organizations can now provide up-to-the-minute information and extend their presence right into their members' (and other stakeholders') desktops. Email marketing is ideal for membership renewal campaigns, disseminating legislative updates that generate a call to action, and much, much more.

But, while e-marketing creates exciting opportunities, it also means a commitment to planning if you aim to maximize this communication. With the right preparation and tools, you can significantly increase your dues and non-dues revenues.

Considerations for planning and implementing your email marketing strategy include:

- Email technology changes at a significant pace. To maximize its potential, you need to keep up with its changing capabilities and usage patterns.
- Effective e-marketing requires the same amount of forethought as print or any other type of marketing campaign. Be careful not to shortcut your groundwork just because sending a blast email is relatively quick and easy.
- Develop an organizational strategy for branding, content, message frequency, subject lines, and "from" fields. Create a clear policy for list and bounced-messages management. Make sure your messages represent you well.
- While full-color html is the preferred method to display messages, you must have a plan for members who cannot (or prefer not to) receive this format. This can be accomplished by using multi-part messages that include html source code and the text version. Once sent, the recipients' email browsers dictate which version to display.
- Once you've captured your members' attention, make it easy to respond. Link your communication to your Web site or provide a buying opportunity (conference registration, continuing education classes, archive offerings, recommended reading, etc.) right in the email.

- Choose an email program or provider that gives you the ability and flexibility to maximize your marketing results. It's now possible to reach nearly 100 percent of your members with technology that automatically sends a fax when an email bounces. The right broadcast email program also enables you to identify and easily follow-up with non-responders. And, needing an IT consultant to send out an attractively branded email is a thing of the past—with the right provider; you can easily send html emails from your desktop.
- You will face challenges in managing your e-marketing program over the long run. Major obstacles include security, viruses, email overload/inundation, and email rejection because of automated spam blockers. Of these, spam is the greatest challenge to the future of email marketing, accounting for more than 50 percent of the messages your members receive.

In addition, estimates are that five to 35 percent of *legitimate* email is mistakenly blocked by spam filters. Learn how anti-spam solutions work. Filters that block unwanted emails evaluate message headers to determine their origin, count the volume of emails from one address to one domain, reject emails that contain certain URL hotlinks, and check content to analyze specific phrases or subject lines.

The best action you can take is to become an intelligent e-marketer. Utilize tracking tools that help you understand your members' preferences so you can modify your campaigns accordingly. Employ an automated spam content checker to help ensure that your messages don't get blocked.

While some email marketers have throttled back their efforts in reaction to recent challenges within the industry, the future looks bright. The marketing power that email brings is immeasurable. Email makes it easy to personalize communications to members and reporting tools instantly measure outcomes, providing hard data on which to base increasingly educated marketing plans for future campaigns.

New uses for email open up exciting ways to communicate with members, including comprehensive e-newsletters with real time polling and online event calendars, financial transaction processing, and promotional event registration. e-Marketing offers a myriad of member outreach opportunities, so plan well to reap its full benefits.

Rich Finstein is an online e-learning specialist and co-founder of CommPartners. He has 25-plus years of experience consulting and serving as a guest speaker at many association educational sessions, as well as devising technology solutions for associations and non-profits. In 1998, he co-developed the technology partner program with ASAE Services. Rich holds a marketing degree from University of Maryland.

CommPartners is an ASAE-endorsed e-marketing services provider, www.commpartners.com/asae.