7.6 Reaching Landowners via Email

This category includes a broad range of messages delivered by electronic means, including personal emails, group messages, e-newsletters, and e-magazines. In addition, emails offer the option to link to other electronic media, such as websites and event sign-ups. The audience for these communications could be one person or many.

WHEN TO USE EMAIL

Email is one of the most efficient communication channels in terms of return on dollars invested.

Provided your audience is connected to the Internet and is comfortable with online media, email is a great way to reach people quickly and drive them to your website or make specific offers. It can be used to grow brand awareness, generate leads, and broadcast information in a timely way. It is also a great way to test different offers, because it can be tracked and results are available fairly quickly.

Because email is inexpensive, it tends to be overused. As a result, people are directing more and more email to their trash or spam folders.

PROS ▲	CONS ▼
• Email is an inexpensive and scalable mechanism; it's good for maintaining contact with large audiences. It's also good for building brand awareness and/or demonstrating expertise (even if the email is seen and not acted upon). • Email offers the opportunity for immediate, timely, and ongoing communication. Events and deadlines are easily promoted. • Electronic communications can be seamlessly integrated across all electronic devices, phones, tablets, and computers. • Emails can carry a decent amount of content. More importantly, they can be used to drive traffic to more detailed information, e.g., on your website. • Content of electronic communications is easily shared through peer networks. • Tracking use and patterns is easy (through opens, clicks, and unsubscribes). • Because emails are inexpensive and immediate, it is very easy to test responses to different messages.	• Emails are not a reliable way to reach audiences. It is common to see open rates of only 10 to 20 percent. • It is time consuming to generate consistent, quality content that will enable your emails to stand out from the deluge of emails that most people now receive daily. • Email needs to be handled skillfully. Too much electronic communication can damage customers' perceptions of your organization or agency. On the other hand, if communication is too sporadic, the audience might view the organization as inconsistent. • This is not a good channel to find new customers. You need to build your own list of people expecting your content. Buying lists and sending unsolicited emails will increase the chances of your emails being blacklisted and sent to the spam folder.

HOW TO GET GOOD RESULTS

- The success of email as a channel depends on a foundation of contacts who have opted in to receiving emails from your organization. Be committed to building those contacts honestly and over time. Do not try to short-circuit this process by purchasing email lists, many of which are compiled fraudulently. Although anti-spam laws technically apply to commercial activity, there is no specific exemption for nonprofits. Sending unsolicited emails damages your organization's credibility and may even earn you a hefty fine.

- Maintenance of the email list over time is also an important consideration. On average, 25 percent of your email list expires each year. It is good practice to provide an unsubscribe option to readers. If a lot of people mark your emails as spam, it damages your credibility score, a factor that spam filters use to identity spam. If your credibility score falls low enough to trigger common spam filters, even people who want to read your emails may never see them.

- It is good practice to have a series of emails that are sent out automatically when new customers sign up to receive communications. These emails should carry some of your more compelling information or offers to demonstrate value to them immediately.

- Research shows personalization increases email effectiveness. Emails can be personalized even with large distribution lists, pulling names from a database for the greeting. Likewise, the sender can be personalized for a given list of contacts to increase likelihood of opens and clicks through e-newsletter software.

- Subject lines should be 15 words or fewer and should not contain words that may trigger spam filters (e.g., "free," "amazing," "this isn't a scam," etc.) or are purposely deceptive (e.g., "you have won").

- Although email seems to be a less formal medium, take care to develop meaningful content and present it in an attractive format. Simple mistakes that otherwise would have been eliminated through proofreading reflect poorly on the quality of your content and offers.

- Your emails will be much better received if you are able to tailor them to be relevant to audience members. As an example, if you're sending a second email to ask people to take some action (e.g., fill out a survey), send that reminder to people who have not yet taken that action. And send a "thank you" email to those who have.

- Consistency in the format, sender, and other elements makes your emails instantly recognizable and works to build your brand among list recipients. Every email should allow readers to click through to your website and should have brief subject headers that follow a similar format. E-newsletters should directly link to relevant information on your website. Any call to action should be clear and should be prominently placed near the top of the email.

- It is important to test your emails on a variety of devices (computers, laptops, tablets, and phones) and operating systems to make sure your messages are clear and attractive in different formats.

BALANCING LIST QUALITY AND SIZE

Email lists are compiled slowly, by harvesting emails from every online, phone, or in-person contact with members of your target audience. You can also post offers on forums, newsletters, or social media sites where audience members are likely to be; the idea is to get them to contact you and give you permission to email them.

How you collect, manage, and use email addresses influences the quality of your list. For example, a pop-up on your website that promotes your e-newsletter is a great way to actively acquire email addresses from potential customers. However, you might choose for a "double opt-in" by sending an email to everyone who signs up on the website, asking them to confirm receipt. This additional opt-in lowers the number of contacts acquired by about 20 to 30 percent, but it builds a higher quality list of contacts by weeding out bogus email addresses.

METRICS TO ASSESS EFFECTIVENESS OF EMAIL CAMPAIGNS

Indicators of the quality of your list

- Your bounce rate is the total percentage of your emails that were unsuccessfully delivered. When your bounce rate is more than 5 to 10 percent, it's time to update your list.

- Delivery rate is the inverse of bounce rate. It is total emails sent minus those that bounced, divided by the total emails sent. This should be around 95 percent.

- Your spam complaint rate reflects the number of email recipients who marked your email as spam. This rate should be very, very low; corrective measures should be taken if it is 1 percent or higher.

- Your list growth rate is the number of new email addresses acquired per time period. You will need at least a 25 percent growth rate just to counter attrition due to opt outs and abandoned email addresses.

Indicators of audience engagement and response

- Your open rate (the percentage of the total emails opened by recipients) and click-through rate (the percentage of people who clicked a link in your email) are important indicators of how well your audience is engaging using the email content.

- Your share rate is the percentage of people who forward the email to a friend.

- Conversion rate is the percentage of email recipients who take desired actions. If the desired action was a donation or a purchase, you can also compute revenue per email.

- Your unsubscribe rate is the percentage of people who opt out of receiving your emails in the future.