

SK&A

Guide to effective email marketing

2016



Introduction

Email marketing continues to be one of the most reliable and consistently top-producing channels in today's marketplace, as well as a very cost-effective way to strengthen your customer relationships and reach new prospects. This year, marketing analysts are predicting a rise in segmentation and personalization, an increase in mobile email access, and growing use of videos, animated gifs and other moving pictures in emails. As email trends and standards evolve and change, it's imperative that strategic guidelines are in place to ensure a successful email campaign.

As a leading provider of healthcare information, SK&A is dedicated to helping you effectively accomplish your direct marketing goals with our end-to-end email service utilizing our database of over 1 million healthcare provider emails. And SK&A can provide you with the expertise to maximize your multi-channel strategy. In this guide, you'll find the latest information on best practices in email marketing to get the most out of your email campaigns for greater success.

CAN-SPAM compliance

On December 16, 2003, President Bush signed into law the Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act of 2003 (CAN-SPAM Act), which establishes a framework for reducing unsolicited email. The law prohibits predatory and abusive commercial email practices.

Email is an extremely important and effective means of communication and is used by millions of Americans on a daily basis for personal and commercial purposes. Its convenience and efficiency, however, are increasingly threatened by the rise in spam. Spam currently accounts for over half of all email traffic. Today, most spam is fraudulent or deceptive in nature. The growth in spam also imposes significant costs on Internet Service Providers (ISPs), businesses and other organizations, since they can only handle a finite volume of email without making further investments in their infrastructure.

SK&A provides Internet-based products and services to healthcare marketers. Internet users' privacy is of the utmost importance to us as we comply with all requirements of the law. We realize that respecting users' privacy and adhering to industry-accepted practices are in the best interests of SK&A and our clients.

- All outbound email messages clearly disclose the user has agreed to receive third-party email messages.
- All the email messages sent by SK&A include a valid opt-out mechanism.
- All opt-out requests are processed within 10 business days of receipt.

The law requires that all email for which the primary purpose is the commercial advertisement or promotion of a product or service include some basic requirements. There are penalties for non-compliance. We have outlined those requirements along with our suggestions in this guide.

7 email best practices & campaign requirements

- 1 FROM LINE** - The “From” line must be the advertiser on all email broadcasts. No generic from lines will be accepted.
- 2 SUBJECT LINE** - The subject line should have a direct reference to the advertisement. It should be clear, relevant, honest and not misleading. There is no requirement to include “ADV” in the subject line.
- 3 MESSAGE CONTENT** - Content should give clear and conspicuous identification that the email is an advertisement or solicitation. The message must be honest and not misleading. The advertiser of the email is responsible for determining how to indicate that the message is a solicitation (i.e., there is no requirement to include any specific language, such as “this is an advertisement”). All messages sent through HDS are subject to review.
- 4 POSTAL ADDRESS** - A valid physical postal address is required in the content of every message. A post-office box or private mailbox can also be used. The physical address must be somewhere that a consumer can physically find the advertiser’s business. Postal address must be that of the advertiser.
- 5 OPT-OUT** - The CAN-SPAM Act requires a clear and conspicuous Internet-based mechanism for recipients to request not to receive future advertisements or promotions. Since images don’t always render in emails, do not place CAN-SPAM mandated information like an opt-out link and address within an image. HDS honors opt out requests within 10 business days of notification and the link is active for a minimum of 30 days.
- 6 OPT-OUT HYGIENE SERVICE** - All advertisers need to maintain accurate and current opt-out lists. All suppression files will be required to be sent to HDS. HDS understands that its customers will need to exclude these records from their email marketing campaigns. Previous opt-out email addresses can simply be suppressed from an HDS marketing campaign.

Should an advertiser decide not to provide opt-out files to HDS, they assume responsibility and liability.
- 7 OPT-OUT LIST SERVICE** - As part of our service, HDS can provide a list of recipients who have elected to opt out from a particular campaign. This allows an advertiser’s opt-out file to be accurate and current.

HTML design recommendations

An effective design should do more than look nice. It should support the message and render correctly. When a picture is properly executed, it really is worth a thousand words. Tight and compelling copy will “hook” users and lead them to the proper call to action. Simple and clean HTML will ensure the message is delivered effectively.

Do

Use HTML software such as Dreamweaver or create basic HTML tags in Notebook or another text editor. Do not use MS Word, MS Publisher, FrontPage or other graphics/desktop publishing software. ImageReady or Fireworks can be used in some instances along with HTML software for designs if used properly.

Use basic HTML tags for the coding. If your HTML software uses CSS for formatting, adjust the preferences to apply formatting using basic HTML tags only. Do not use embedded CSS or link to your style sheets. They should always be inline if you are using them. The exception is @media queries.

Provide a hyperlink to a related website or at least an email address that the recipient can contact if there is not a website available. When contacting someone via email, they prefer to respond electronically. A call to action that uses a phone number is least likely to get a response.

Keep the width of the HTML message between 450 and 600 pixels to ensure the design is not cut off in preview panes for recipients and eliminate the need for scrolling horizontally to see the whole design. With more and more people viewing email on mobile devices, this is even more of a concern.

Add links to your site. The more links to your site, the better.

Have someone other than you spell-check the copy. Most likely, you’ve been working on this for a while. A fresh set of eyes is more likely to catch a spelling error.

Be consistent with your FROM name and subject lines. Use the same From Name and put the name of your company at the beginning of the subject line. These techniques will increase brand recognition, while reducing the appearance that you are changing your format to elude ISP Spam Filters.

Customize your pre-header text. Pre-header used for “offer” information rather than “format issue” instructions can generate an 18 percent higher open rate.

Send your creative to your HDS sales rep for review by the Email Services Team. They can look over message content, as well as the HTML coding, and offer suggestions.

Design for mobile. This includes using responsive or mobile-friendly design with minimal copy and few pictures.

Don't

Use external or embedded Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), JavaScript, Submission Forms, Layers or Rich Media (i.e., Flash movies, animation). These cause deliverability issues which can affect the campaign responses, hinder deliverability for future campaigns, and do not render correctly in many email ISPs.

– If you have a video that you want your recipients to see, you can take a screenshot of it and include a big “play” button, then place that picture into your email. Make it a link to view the video on your website. This method allows all recipients to play it, so you don’t have to worry about video support in email clients.

- Support for internet forms is inconsistent. We recommend that you link to your form on your website, where you know it will work.

Use comments in the HTML code of your email as they can potentially flag spam triggers.

Put URL text in your email. In order to track the links, we have to redirect to them, meaning the actual link is different than the text in the email. This sets off spam filters and may get your message blocked. It is better to use text such as “Please visit this site,” rather than, “Please visit www.oursite.com.”

Subject line recommendations

Never underestimate the importance of a great subject line. It doesn’t matter how amazing your creative is if no one opens the email to see it.

Do

- Mention “Email Only” offers in the subject line. These can generate a 14 percent higher overall open rate.
- Include the specific job function of your target audience in subject lines. These can generate a 14 percent higher overall open rate. (SK&A has specialty information on Providers!)
- Keep the subject line fewer than 50 characters.

Don’t

- USE ALL CAPS
- Use exclamation points!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
- Bait and switch. Your subject line should match your message.

According to a recent subject line analysis by Adestra, the following words in email subject lines sent by B2B marketers in a variety of industries, including professional services, financial services, conferences and events, either increased open rates or decreased open rates.

Subject line words that increase open rates	Subject line words that decrease open rates
News	Alert
Exclusive	Download
Exhibition	Whitepaper
Week’s	Forecast
Newsletter	Report
Research	Journal
Special	Breaking
Update	Free
Video	Explore
Voucher	Webinar
10% off	Seminar
25% off	Last chance
Countdown	Learn

Messaging recommendations

The focus of your messaging should always focus on the benefit to the user, both in the headline and in the body. Aim to answer the question “What’s in it for me?” for the recipient within one second. Segmenting your audiences and personalizing your messages are also musts. Doing so allows for more targeted campaigns with better results.

When creating the text of your message, avoid using the following words or phrases:

- ALL CAPS WORDS OR SENTENCES
- spam
- ***** (e.g. as a separator in plain text messages)
- 1-800... or 1-888...
- 100% satisfaction
- 18 years or older
- a tracking number (visible, not autodetect)
- act now
- amazing stuff
- click to remove
- Excessive “click here” links
- clickhere (no space)
- consolidate bill
- credit card debt
- custom quote
- dream vacation
- mortgage rate
- no obligation
- opt-in
- optout@
- receive this email because
- receive this mail in error
- received this email because
- removal information
- remove in the subject
- removed from our mailing
- satisfaction is guaranteed
- satisfaction guaranteed
- subject=remove
- earn \$
- email marketing
- fast cash
- financial freedom
- free consultation
- free information
- free phone
- free membership
- free quote
- future mailing
- home financing
- limited time offer
- lose weight
- mail is never sent unsolicited
- money back guarantee

Emailing healthcare organization decision-makers

As healthcare organizations under consolidations, new decision makers are emerging and decision-making processes are changing. Sharing risk, reducing operating costs and minimizing waste are top organizational goals, along with achieving the Affordable Care Act's triple aim of improving the quality of healthcare, lowering healthcare costs and improving health outcomes of entire populations.

In this dynamic environment, healthcare marketers must adjust their sales and marketing strategies to meet the changing demands and communications preferences of decision makers along the supply chain. To understand the communications preferences of these new decision makers, SK&A's sister company, Healthcare Data Solutions (HDS) conducted a survey of over 11,000 decision makers at hospitals, health systems, GPOs and other healthcare organizations. The following are the results.

77 percent of HCO decision makers prefer email.

HCO decision makers, ranging from the C-Suite, Administrators and Medical Directors to Buyers, Supply Directors and Purchasing Managers, chose email as their preferred method of contact with potential suppliers.

88 percent of HCO decision makers use desktop computers.

Unlike Physicians, who primarily access email through mobile devices, HCO decision makers overwhelmingly access email through desktop computers. Here it is important to pay special attention to how your email renders and captures attention on a desktop computer without ignoring the intricacies of mobile design.

More than 80 percent of HCO decision makers use Outlook.

HCO decision makers also differ markedly from Physicians in their choice of email platform: Physicians primarily use Apple Mail to read email, while HCO decision makers use Outlook. Here, it is critical to ensure that the company handling your email marketing is able to perform rendering tests across a variety of email platforms and troubleshoot for any issues specific to Outlook.

63 percent of HCO decision makers want industry news.

The results from our survey align with the subject line analysis by Adestra, which showed that subject lines containing the word "news" increases open rates. These results also support new sales models that involve building relationships and forming partnerships, rather than just selling a product or service. Providing information that makes the HCO decision maker's job easier is an effective way to demonstrate industry expertise and strengthen relationships with existing and potential customers.

Two to seven people are involved in the decision-making process.

Nearly half of all HCO decision makers reported that 2-3 people are involved in the decision-making process, but 22.54 percent said that 4-5 people are involved, and 14 percent more than 7 people are involved. Having a complete picture of the entire healthcare supply chain, as well as understanding who and what influences purchases are crucial elements of marketing campaigns aimed at HCO decision makers.

To learn more about email marketing services from SK&A, visit www.skainfo.com or call 800-752-5478.