

IRRESISTIBLE EMAIL

Winning Hearts and Minds through the Inbox. With a smart strategy, email can be a vital communication channel for engaging supporters and raising money.



Strategize

Establish objectives for your organization's email strategy first. Your email communications are an extension of your program strategy and must be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound. The [Spitfire Smart Chart@](#) helps you think through these questions and incorporate better email practices into your overarching communication strategy.

Research

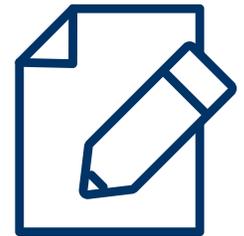
Since nonprofits are sending more emails than ever before, there is more competition for your audience's attention. Therefore, the more that you can do to break through the clutter, the better. Research your members and segment them into different lists according to the information that you gather: interest areas based on response rate, activism level, demographics, location and age. As you learn more about the interests of individual subscribers, you can craft increasingly relevant content. You should treat people who respond to 80 percent of your action alerts differently from those who respond to 10 percent. This personal touch deepens your relationship and engagement with your subscribers, making them more valuable advocates and supporters.

Craft

+Subject Lines

The subject line is the most important part of your message. It determines if a subscriber opens or ignores your email. Clearly state what the email contains in a brief, informative and personal manner. Emails with shorter subject lines (around 50-70 characters) tend to work best for mobile devices.

Because there is no one-size-fits-all approach to subject lines, we recommend testing them over time to see what length, keywords and phrases capture readers' attention. Adding personalization, such as your recipient's name or location, can be a great way to get noticed. Using emojis and icons, especially for mobile subscribers, can be effective, but consider that emojis display slightly differently based on the operating system. Avoid using ALL CAPS or too many punctuation marks as they can set off spam filters. Include a call to action when necessary, but keep in mind that you'll lose subscribers' interest if urgency is overdone.



+From Lines

Each time your organization is listed on a LinkedIn member's profile helps put you in front of vast networks of like-minded people. Encourage your current and past staffers and volunteers to include your organization on their profiles.

+Body

Lead your email with the most compelling information in succinct and direct language. Recipients likely will stop reading if they're not engaged from the start. Vary the types of emails by incorporating a call to action, relevant news, visuals and authentic stories. Include deadlines on your calls to action and end with a clear ask that stands out in the text and provide opportunities to volunteer, advocate, donate or attend pertinent events. Include only one call to action per email and repeat it once or twice in the email. Develop a content calendar to plan for key themes, events and calls to action that support your program or campaign strategy.

+Design

To make your email easy to read and skim, use bold headers, bulleted lists and buttons, and give hyperlinked text, especially calls to action, a separate line to stand out. Limit the number of fonts, text sizes and colors. Use a template that is consistent with your brand and include compelling images or graphics that support your message.

Perform

+Timing

Schedule emails when you know that your readers are most likely to read them. Most email users prefer to open email before the work day and during lunch. Studies vary widely on the average open rate and click-through rate for nonprofits. In 2019, one [study found an average open rate of 15 percent](#) and an average click-through rate of 2.4 percent for advocacy emails and 0.44 percent for fundraising emails. [MailChimp](#) found a nonprofit open rate of 21 percent and a click-through rate of 2.61 percent. Use your email analytics to learn that your audiences' behavior and the best time of day to reach them. The highest open rate tends to be within the first hour of delivery, but your list may perform differently. Send no more than one email per week and no less than one per month, but your metrics will tell your list's story.



+Listen, Test and Improve

Test the timing, frequency, tone and content of your emails to learn what content and messaging resonates with your audiences. Most email providers offer [A/B testing](#), which involves sending one version of an email to a small segment of an email list and a second version to an equal number of subscribers to determine which version performs better. The winning email is sent to the remaining portion of the list. You can test with lists as small as a few thousand subscribers. Experiment with the subject line, sender, call to action and time or day of the week that you deliver your emails. You should check analytics reports after each email campaign to track open, click-through and unsubscribe rates. Additionally, you can get direct feedback from your subscribers by conducting surveys.



+Build Your List

Start growing your email list by inviting supporters to sign up through your website, social media channels, paid search and donor and volunteer forms. To make sharing easy and capture users on your social channels, include a "forward to a friend" link and your social media icons at the top of the page. After a supporter takes an action on your website (i.e., signs a petition or sends a letter to Congress), redirect that supporter to a "tell a friend" page to share the same action with their friends through social media or email. You can pay to grow your nonprofit's list through email list acquisition services, such as [Care2](#), but make sure to onboard your new names with a welcome email to discourage immediate unsubscribing. As you start to grow your list, be sure to follow [CAN-SPAM guidelines to protect](#) your reputation and email deliverability.

