Ten Tips for Nonprofit Email Success

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We all use email to communicate to some degree. (We know this because you likely got to this story by reading an email from us and clicking a link in it.) Email is quick. It is efficient. It costs a lot less than direct mail. But it's also easy to have an email be disregarded or missed by its intended recipient. When you need a recipient to take a particular action, such as to volunteer, to sign a petition, to call their elected officials, or to donate, you need your message to work.

First, you need the email to arrive in someone's inbox. Then, you need them to open it. Next, you need them to click a link to take action. Miss any of those steps and that action doesn't happen. Here are some tips to get from delivery to open to click to action.

Boosting delivery rates

An email deliverability study conducted in 2015 showed that 21 percent of emails never made it to a subscriber's inbox. Thankfully, that study showed that, for nonprofits, that rate was only 11 percent, demonstrating the trust people have in our messages. But that still means that 1 in 10 emails you are sending have zero chance of inspiring engagement. Here are a few tips to make sure your messages get to their intended destination.

- Make sure you are using double opt-in for your email list. This means that new subscribers need to click a link in an automated email that is sent when they subscribe in order to confirm their subscription. This helps cut down on non-working email addresses on your list (perhaps because the subscriber made a typo in their email address) and ensures that no one attempted to subscribe someone to your list without their consent (something that could cause that person to report you as a spammer).
- Using one of the more recognized email services, such as Constant Contact, Vertical Response, MailChimp, or Emma, can help. Those services are recognized by spam filters and help messages get to the inbox.
- Ensure your messages are properly formatted and [comply with CAN-SPAM regulations](#). Having an easy-to-find unsubscribe link is required. Without it, your message might end up in spam.

The folks at SendGrid (another good email service) have even [more tips to boost your email deliverability](#).

Boosting open rates

Ok. Your email has made it to the inbox. Now, you need to motivate someone to open your message. This is important, not just because you want people to read your content, but if your open rate is too low, it can affect deliverability to others. Having too much "[graymail](#)," or mail that sits in an inbox unopened, can harm your organization by increasing its spam score.

- Your subject line is almost more important than the content in the message. The subject line helps a reader decide whether or not to open the message. Using [A/B testing](#) through your email provider can help you identify what words resonate better than others. You can even use a platform like [Robly](#), which will re-send the message with a different subject line to anyone that didn't open the first message.
- The "From" name on the email also has an effect. If your organization is one of the many that prefer to have a person's name as the "from" name, rather than the organization, be sure to also have the organization's name to help subscribers connect the message with your organization. "Sam from ABC Nonprofit" is more likely to have their message opened than just "Sam."

- Keep your list clean. Do some [spring cleaning at least once a year](#) to clear out subscribers who are no longer opening your messages.

ShortStack has a great [infographic with more open rate tips](#).

Boosting click-through rates

Once your email has been opened, now it's time to get your reader to take action. Most likely, that action is going to be taken by clicking a certain link in the message.

- Stay focused. If you have ten links in a message, chances are your readers may not click on the one you want them to click on.
- Don't hesitate to have the most important link appear twice, and in different ways. You can have the link appear in the text of the message and in an image or button.
- If you are using any images in the message, don't forget the ALT tags, which help both readers with visual impairments and people who just keep images turned off in their email program know what the image is of.
- Be sure your link text is descriptive. Never have just the words "click here" or "find out more" be your links. If you can't tell exactly where that link will lead without reading additional words in a sentence, then different words need to be linked.

HubSpot has some more [tips to boost your nonprofit's click-throughs](#).