



Best Practices Guide: Email Marketing

Email marketing can be a tricky communication method. Used incorrectly, it can alienate your audience or even hurt the goal you are trying to accomplish. But if used effectively, email marketing is a powerful tool that can help you achieve results like increasing event attendance, strengthening your relationship with your alumni base, or recruiting prospective students to your academic program.

The SMU Meadows Marketing department is here to help you achieve your objectives in the most effective, cost-efficient manner possible. If you're considering an email marketing campaign, take a moment to read through this helpful guide to best practices including audience considerations, timelines, content and more.

When you're ready to launch your campaign, just visit this link and fill out the project request form: <http://bit.ly/msamarketingrequest>

Section I: Pre-Project Questions

If you're considering an email campaign, ask yourself these questions before getting started.

- What is your goal as a result of the campaign? Is it to increase attendance at an event? Create awareness for a project or news item? Generate admission applications? Whatever your goal may be, clearly defining it will help you measure success later.
- Once you've clearly articulated your goal, ask yourself: Is an email campaign the best possible way to achieve it? Or is there an alternative marketing solution that may be better suited to your audience or message? (*See Section II for more information on knowing your audience.*)
- How should the message be delivered? The Meadows Marketing department uses Constant Contact for formalized email campaigns; the sender's address will appear as meadows@smu.edu. If you want the campaign to come from a pre-established division email address (i.e. temerlin@smu.edu or pollock@smu.edu) or an individual's email address, make sure the address lends strong credibility to the campaign.
- How should the email look? Stylized templates with custom HTML can increase the lead-time needed by the department, but can also lend a professional look to the campaign. Should the email look like an official letter? Many templates and customizations are available once you have decided on the appropriate look and feel.
- When do you want to send the email? Keep in mind the Meadows marketing division requires at a **minimum two weeks of lead-time** in order to build and send a custom email campaign. More complex emails can at times take even longer. Plan ahead to ensure we can meet your request!

Section II: Audience

You've thought through all of the project considerations listed above and are ready to launch your email campaign. What's next? Successful execution starts with knowing your audience.

- Who is your audience? Are they current students? Prospective students? Alumni? Donors? Who your audience is can shape the style and tone of your email. (For instance, an older audience base may not be best reached via email, and could be better communicated with using a printed, mailed piece.)
- Who else is talking to this audience, and when? If your recipients are being frequently hit with similar messages, it may limit your effectiveness – or require a layout and content that will catch their attention.
- Is your audience in a state to be receptive to your message? For example, a frequent complaint from recent graduates is the plethora of donation solicitations they receive; if you had a similar goal in mind, it might be best to wait a few months to reach out to your audience.
- What kind of content does your audience want? For instance, Dance alums have shown a high level of interest in learning what current students and faculty are working on; an email intended to promote an upcoming concert might also include a short video of a recent performance, or a link to a Facebook photo gallery. Making your content relevant and interesting for the specific audience is essential to email marketing success.

Section III: Content

You know your audience, and now you're ready to tackle the content and layout of the email. The marketing department can assist you in the creation of content; but here are a few things to keep in mind.

- A good subject line can help increase your open rate. Think about what will motivate your audience to open the email and try to communicate it in a few words.
 - Bad subject line: *Hello Meadows Alums!* (Too general; the subject line doesn't provide any incentive to opening)
 - Good subject line: *Meadows Dance alums, you're invited to a special event!* (Recognizing the division in the subject line shows the recipient this message is specifically intended for them; offering them something makes them feel the email has information they want; and keeping the offer general entices curiosity to learn what the offer is)
- Shorter is better. Marketing messages are competing more than ever before for the attention of their intended audience. Make an email too long, and you'll lose the reader's attention; even worse, you'll train them not to open your next communication. The longer the email is, the more important it is for the content to be valuable and engaging. Mixing various forms of media such as photos or videos will help the reader stay interested longer.
- Looks are important. In other words, the look and feel of the email should match not only your intended audience but also the Meadows brand. The marketing team can

work with you to choose an existing template or create a new one that conveys the appropriate tone for your message. In some cases, text-only email can be just as effective based on the audience and message.

- Consistency is vital. Your message should stay true to the Meadows brand and its values. As you craft your content, make sure it is consistent with the overall brand and our marketing strategy. If you have doubts or questions, just ask us at meadows@smu.edu.

Section IV: Timeline

You've crafted great copy for your audience, and your layout looks polished and ready for the public. Now it's time to determine when to send your email – it can be a deciding factor in your campaign's success or failure!

- The day and time you send your email can be the difference between your message being read or being trashed. Avoid Mondays, weekends and early mornings. Specifically, Tuesday-Thursday around lunchtime are the most optimal send times. Plan your project submission accordingly!
- Many times your email campaign will require hitting the same audience with the same message more than once; this occurs frequently with event-based projects. In general, we recommend hitting the audience no more than twice with the same message. Consider the first email's goal as to create awareness and urge early action; and the second email (closer to the event date) as a strong call to action (i.e. ACT NOW!)
- Email marketing messages from Meadows face a unique challenge: we are frequently hitting the same audience over and over (for instance, a theatre alum might receive two emails from the division during a semester; but would also receive general emails to Meadows alums, as well as emails sent to all SMU alums). Keep this in mind when you plan your timeline; could you send one email with three short pieces of content rather than three separate emails?
- If you are beginning a "regular" email communication project, establish a schedule and stick to it. Consistency helps establish a regular readership; your audience knows you will be emailing them and trusts that your message is of value.
- Make sure to time your message based on the action you want the audience to take. If you want them to attend an event, a general rule of thumb is to send the first notice two weeks in advance; and a final reminder a few days before the event. Sending the email too early will lack urgency; and sending it too late won't allow enough time for the audience to plan their action. If your audience will require travel, you should consider sending the email at least six weeks in advance.

Section V: Analytics

Numbers can tell us a lot about the success of your campaign, as well as help us adjust your strategy going forward. The Meadows digital marketing team can pull numbers from past campaigns as well as provide you with numbers for each communication you send. If we don't provide them to you, feel free to request them!

The following is a quick definition of terms and what they can tell you about your campaign.

- **Dates/Times** – We have records of all email marketing messages we send, and can analyze when and what time they were sent and the resulting success of the email.
- **Sent** – The number of contacts your email is sent to. Used to calculate the percentage of recipients who opened the email.
- **Bounces** – The number of wrong or outdated email addresses; the communication is not delivered and therefore ‘bounces.’ The lower the number, the better your recipient list is.
- **Spam Outs** – The number of times that your email was filtered to a spam folder. If the number is high, you may need to add a line to the beginning of your email asking the recipient to add the sender to their address book; or, you may need to more specifically target the audience with your subject line (or both).
- **Opt Outs** – The number of people who choose to not receive any further communication from Meadows; they “opt out” of the email list. If your opt-out number becomes a significant percentage of your list, you may need to re-evaluate your campaign in terms of content and frequency. For larger audiences, opt outs should be less than 1 percent.
- **Open Rate** – A measure of how many people open or view a particular email campaign. The recipient must download the images to count as an open. A good open rate by industry standards is anywhere between 10 and 15 percent. Meadows emails, thanks to an engaged audience base, usually average between 20 and 25 percent.
- **Clicks** – The number of people who click on links you include in your email communication. The higher the number of clicks, the more engaged people are in the content you are offering them.
- **Forwards** – The number of times that recipients are forwarding your email to someone else using the ‘official’ Forward button (in other words, hitting “Fwd” in Outlook does not count). Indicates a high level of engagement and the desire to share your communication with others who they believe will also value the message.

If you’ve made it this far, you’re now a seasoned email marketing pro!

Please direct questions or comments to meadows@smu.edu.

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