

March 2022

ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

Why email is still an effective way to reach people

The internet offers so many ways to connect and communicate with people. There is no question about the value of digital tools and outreach. Sometimes, however, it may seem too easy to reach for the newest social technology trend or employ so many tools that it becomes difficult to use them well or track their effectiveness.

Email is a tried-and-true way to communicate

For many workers, and most parents, it is almost impossible to imagine life before email. It is an essential tool. Almost four billion people worldwide have an email account, and an estimated 300 billion emails are sent daily.

For years, digital experts have announced the death of email for public outreach. This premature prediction hasn't held true because email offers many advantages as a tool in your communications toolbox. It offers a way to build an audience list, create targeted communications and ensure easy two-way messaging. A strategic email plan can be a valuable complement to social media, newsletters and direct communication.

Consider this district that combined email, website content, school newsletters and social posts to advertise a workshop for parents with a popular child psychologist.

The district was surprised by the unusually large turnout of more than 300 parents. When they asked participants how they'd heard about the workshop, parents said email, combined with supplemental details on the website, was the main source.

For general information, this combination is extremely effective for announcements and reminders. For targeted information, it is still hard to beat.

In another school district, the superintendent built a "key communicators network" that he can reach instantly via email whenever there is important school news. He's communicating with a large cross-section of his community and getting instant feedback that he can respond to immediately.

Email may not be as trendy or fashionable as social media channels, but it still needs to be part of a communication mix that maintains the balance between electronics and face-to-face.

Best practices for email communications

There are tips for writing effective emails that can help you overcome barriers to reaching your audiences effectively. Some of these issues can include a lack of trust, familiarity and quality.

For subscription information, contact WSSDA at (800) 562-8927 or (360) 493-9231.

For content questions, contact: Marcia Latta Communications Consultant (503) 580-2612.

Reproduction rights for materials distributed as part of *On Call* are granted only to subscribing districts and are restricted to distribution as part of their local public relations programs.



(Over)

The content and structure of the message are critical. Recipients will be more likely to trust and understand what you say if the email is written well and presented professionally.

- Keep messages short, accurate and timely. When news needs to be shared quickly, be sure a message is ready to go. Having a template in your files can help you customize and respond faster.
- Email messages lack interpersonal clues. They can be easily misunderstood, especially when messages deal with sensitive issues. Recipients can perceive angry tones, abrupt manners and even humor incorrectly. Deal with sensitive, confidential or controversial issues — good or bad — face-to-face.
- Even now, some people may not have access to email. Make provisions to inform all parties. Also, be sure to consider your audiences with non-English language needs.
- Define your policies and protocols to ensure appropriate communication with parents, district- and building-level staff.
- Capture new email addresses to add to your lists. Do student registration forms include a space for parents' email addresses? A place for parents to indicate how they would like to receive school communications? Is someone at the building level assigned the task of making sure parents receive school communications in their preferred format? Do printed communications include the same notices as email messages? If you are sending unsolicited email, recipients need to opt in for subsequent messaging.
- What are you doing at the district level to build a database of email addresses of citizens who are interested in the schools and want to be informed? Are you working to send meeting agendas and minutes electronically? Are local media representatives included on your email list? The ability to use this list for targeted communications is a powerful benefit of email messaging.
- Be sure to reply to your emails. Assign someone to respond quickly to questions or comments, and be sure to maintain your mail list. Using an email marketing service, such as Emma, Mail Chimp, Constant Contact, or another service, can streamline this.

Email content tips

Understand and write to your audience. Tailor your correspondence, especially the tone. Your voice will be different in an email to members of your chamber of commerce vs. parents of your kindergarten classes.

Use active voice. This is standard practice for good writing. In an email, it will help messages deliver clear, concise information or requests for action.

Craft a catchy subject line. Your open rate will improve if the subject line is compelling. Write a subject line that captures attention and motivates readers to open the message to read more. This is essential for unsolicited emails that have a dismal open rate, estimated at only 20%.

Write for mobile reading. Increasingly, emails are opened and read on the small screens of mobile devices. Write text passages that are not too long. Avoid images or check to be sure they display correctly. Select a legible font. Again, an email marketing platform can help optimize your message for a variety of screen sizes.

Send it at the right time to maximize the open rate. Digital marketing provider Hubspot analyzed open rates for emails and found that 10 a.m., 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. had the highest open rates. (<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/best-time-to-send-email>). That could be a rule-of-thumb for your district to get started. After a few email campaigns, check the analytics in your email marketing software to see if times are different in your district.

Using Email

March 2022

Page 3

Electronic communications are a standard part of any communications plan and practice. Which ones create the most effective and powerful channels for your outreach to improve school and community relationships? Conducting a regular inventory of what you have in place and how you're using it will help you improve your efforts and consider integrating email communications into your plan if it isn't in regular use.

Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant