Tips & Tricks for Better MandateMail Broadcasts

Here's a big-picture look on a few simple tips and tricks to make your email campaigns more effective. Need a refresher on using MandateMail first? Review our how-to guides for using MandateMail: "MandateMail 101" and "MandateMail 201" (PDFs).

The Basics

- **Keep it short & simple.** Text-heavy emails cause readers to set emails aside for "later." Simplify things instead by linking back to articles on your website that require deep or additional explanation.

- **When appropriate, use visuals.** The old adage of a picture being worth 1,000 words isn't far off. Add relevant images to make your campaign pop. Images get clicked on – so add a link to your pitch.

- **Be professional with your font.** Pick a font and font size and, generally, stick with it. Also avoid different or flashy text colors (like red) that can be distracting and can make your email look unprofessional. Don't underline – users will be confused and try to click on that text.

- **Be consistent**. Your messaging should be consistent across various platforms – email, your website, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Also, coordinate your content if you're sending email on a new policy initiative, there should be information about this initiative on your website and social media.

- **Test, test, test.** Once you have composed an email and followed some of the tips below, send yourself a "test" email. This is a great way to catch mistakes, oversights, font errors, link errors, and stuff that's all-too-easy to miss. The easiest, safest way to do this is to send an email to your "Test Group" found in your audiences list – although make it clear to your team that your email is a "test" by changing your email sender name to add a "[TEST]" before it for the single test email.

How Do I Get Them to Open My Email?

This is one of the biggest questions we hear: I've produced a quality email message, but how do I get my audience to open their email? Here are a few basic tips toward a higher open rate:

- **Subject lines are critical.** Your email's subject line is the first touch point with your audience. It shouldn't be too long, and it should grab your reader's attention. Keep 'em short: some email programs or web-based email clients will cut off your subject line after five or six words.

- **Make it relevant**. Your subject line should obviously be relevant to the text of your email, but it also needs to be relevant to your audience. Think about your message from the audience's perspective – why is it important to them?

- **Make it compelling**. This is the tricky part: you can try humor, sarcasm, or add urgency; these may or may not work with your audience or your organization's voice. Sometimes these can work; sometimes being straightforward is better.

- **Your "From" line.** Change things up and send your e-mails from different campaign "voices": staff, volunteers, key endorsers.

Avoid the Spam Trap

Email providers are developing more and more sophisticated anti-spam filters. One of your biggest challenges will be avoiding the spam filter and delivering your messages to your audience. With a few simple tricks, however, this is possible:

- **Basic phrases.** Avoid the phrase "click here" and opt instead for action words (read/learn more/get the details).

- **Colors & Boxes.** Don't include a background color, and lots of borders and boxes. Simpler is better for viewers' eyes and spam filters. The more it looks like a personal note, the less "spammy" it feels.

- **Links & Phishing.** If you include a link in your email, do not type the URL directly into your email's body text. Instead link this URL directly to existing text in your email.

  - **Example:** If you want to have your audience visit your campaign website, say "Visit my campaign website" (linked to the site) as opposed to "Visit www.website.com."

When Do I Send my Email?

There isn't a perfect time to send an email. But there are a few basic rules you should follow when it comes to timing your email campaign.

- **Not Weekends.** Email readership drops Friday night through early Monday morning, and you are more likely to get caught in a Monday-morning inbox purge. *(Note: This contrasts with Facebook)*

- **Evenings & Holidays.** The same logic as above applies: if you expect people are out and about, or spending time away from their email, then they will be less likely to read your messages.

- **Timing.** Send emails when you expect people to be at their desks or checking their inbox. 9 a.m. through 5 p.m. on workdays is the rule of thumb.

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For the best results, send your messages in the late morning through the early afternoon, 10 a.m. through 2 p.m. People will have dug out from any emails sent the night before, or will be checking their phones/personal email during lunchtime. Similarly, Tuesdays through Thursdays work better, as people are less likely to be available on Mondays and Fridays (weekend catch-up, early/long weekends, etc.).

- **The Exception**. If you have timely breaking news that must go out, feel free to ignore the above rules within reason.

What Else?

- **Video.** Video is a great way to get your message out there and serves as a strong replacement for large blocks of text.

  - **How do you send video?** Videos can't be embedded in emails. Instead, create a page on your website where you have it embedded and link to it in the email. The best and most creative way to link to this video in your email is to create a screen-capture of the video for people to click on.

- **Follow up**. If you send a message asking your audience to take some action, don't leave them hanging! Follow up with another message sharing the results of the campaign with them. Similarly, don't forget to thank your supporters for their work and activism.

- **Talk about more than money**. Remember that your email program is not simply a vehicle for asking for money. It's okay to ask for money – and even to ask often – but be sure you're giving your supporters something that's valuable for them in between. Engaging your readers with non-fundraising content will improve your fundraising performance.

- **The longer arc.** Consider multi-email campaigns, not just one-shot asks. Introduce a goal, produce enthusiasm and momentum along the way, and celebrate success when it's achieved. This is true for fundraising campaigns and other sorts of engagement.

Need Help?

Need help with any aspects of what we've written above? Have other questions or concerns about how to make the best use of MandateMail? Need some help with composition or strategy? We're here to help! Contact Ben DuPree at ben@mandatemedia.com.