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Business Communication Insights

In this digital age, communicating with a mass audience has never been easier. With a few keystrokes you can reach friends, fans and followers via Facebook, Twitter, Groupon and YouTube. But when trying to touch select groups like prospects and clients in a personal tone, the medium of email is still one of the most valuable tools for professional property managers.

According to the Direct Marketing Association, in 2010, email marketing returned \$43 for every dollar spent. That's an incredible ROI when compared with media such as print or TV. That's because it's relatively cheap, if not free, to compose and mass distribute a targeted message to an audience of your choice.

THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

Of course, choosing the right email tool is the first step to using email effectively for your business or marketing messages. First, check with your Internet Service Provider (ISP) or website hosting company to see if they offer bulk email delivery service.

If not, there are a number of reputable email correspondence providers like Constant Contact, Emma, MailChimp and VerticalResponse, to name a few. They are affordable and are extremely good at what they do, including tracking the open and click rates of your campaigns. These analytics can be invaluable when planning future campaigns.

The bulk delivery services all pretty much operate in the same way: choose your template (or create a custom one), insert your message along with any logos and images you'd like to use, and upload your mailing list before hitting "send." Here are a few tips to keep in mind for optimum delivery and readability when using a bulk delivery service:

USE PERMISSION-BASED LISTS

Be sure the addresses you are sending to are associated with people who want to hear from you. This can be tricky for a number of reasons. Errors can be made when writing or typing email addresses. Sometimes people intentionally provide fake addresses, or they may forget they signed up to receive mail from

you in the first place!

Most email marketing experts agree that email permissions go stale within six months or less. We've all signed up for the latest fad newsletter only to tire of the weekly (or daily) invasion of our inboxes. So it's typical to see a certain percentage of your emails "bounce," or be undeliverable with each mailing. And, you may have people decide to hit the "unsubscribe" button because they've changed their minds about receiving newsletters and/or special offers from you.

Bounces and unsubs are bad enough, but what you really want to avoid is having a recipient (or worse, more than one) mark your email as "spam." Messages identified as spam, or unsolicited bulk mail, are reported to the recipient's ISP, who can block you from sending emails in the future.

Getting blocked, or "blacklisted," is very, very bad. Using a bulk delivery service like MailChimp or the others can help keep your emails from landing in spam land because those companies' reputations are at stake if they do allow spammers to use their services.

According to MailChimp, 0.1% for spam or abuse complaints, 5% for bounces and 1% for unsubs are the thresholds set by ISPs and other spam patrolers. Campaigns with complaint, bounce and unsubscribe rates higher than those thresholds risk account suspension. To illustrate these thresholds, more than one complaint or 10 unsubs from a mailing of 1,000 addresses would trigger an alert from your email service provider.

THINK ANTI-SPAM

All of these safety measures are to ensure compliance with the 2003 CAN SPAM Act, which was passed for the protection of all consumers (including you!).

The Act outlines the regulations and responsibilities for sending commercial email and is worth a read if your business participates in sending emails to multiple recipients. Here are a few highlights of the law:

1. Be truthful with your header and subject lines.



2. If your message is truly an advertisement, identify it as such.
3. Always include your physical and postal address.
4. Include a clearly-defined “unsubscribe” method and quickly honor those requests (within 48 hours).
5. Even if you use a third-party service to send your emails, you are still legally responsible for complying with the law.

CONTENT IS KEY

The key to not being perceived as spam in the inboxes of your recipients is to keep your email messages relevant and personal. Whether a monthly newsletter filled with news your tenants care about, or some new properties you may have available for old prospects, be sure to craft the message so the recipient knows it’s truly meant for him – not just another in the long list bound for the great inbox in the sky.

We’ve all had those days when our inboxes are full of email and not one of them is from a person we care to hear from – much less from an actual person. Between the cable company, public radio station, my bank and scores of clothing companies, I receive enough electronic reading material to make me question if the U.S. Postal Service is still in operation. And very little of it actually applies to me or my needs.

So, always ask yourself: “what would our clients and prospects like to see from us?” Not just “what do we want to tell them?” Ask yourself whether the message is one you would like to receive or would benefit from.

Remember, it is a relationship you are trying to nurture – not a race you are trying to win. Some good examples of newsletters with relevant and personal content are those distributed by Cooks Illustrated, Field Notes and Inc. Magazine (see samples at narpm.propertyboss.com).

CLEAN & SIMPLE DESIGN

In addition to securing a clean mailing list and developing compelling content, another factor to consider (and one you may never be able to completely control) is the appearance of your email in each email client program out there, not to mention mobile devices. You don’t know when you send to [\[hercompany.com\]\(http://hercompany.com\) if she is using Microsoft Outlook, Mac Mail, or any of the tons of web-based email services like Gmail or Yahoo to view the message you are sending.](mailto:jane@</p></div><div data-bbox=)

Since every email program renders, or interprets, HTML differently, experts advise testing your emails in several different mail clients and on both PCs and Macs, if possible. Bulk delivery companies also provide preview and inspection features that allow you to see exactly how your message will be rendered in different platforms.

To avoid some of the frustrations of testing and sending HTML emails, keep your design as clean and simple as possible. Of course you want to include images and appealing graphical elements, but be aware those images and graphics may not be viewed by all recipients.

One trick is to use text as a design element. Choose a different font, font size or color to accentuate a point instead of an image that may not be rendered as beautifully across all email platforms.

IN CLOSING

Email is still an easy, affordable and valuable tool for you to use to reach clients, and even prospects, with transactional, as well as informative and marketing messages. Here are five things Emma, a popular email marketing company, recommends reviewing prior to sending any email campaign:

- Does my subject line entice readers to open? They’re the most important 8-10 words in your campaign.
- Am I making the most of the preview pane? Many of your recipients will just see the first few inches of your campaign.
- Is my email easy on the eyes? Use simple, intentional font and style choices.
- Does the message come through, even if the images don’t? Many email clients don’t automatically display images.
- Does this email have a personal touch? Make sure your email feels like a conversation with people who know you.

More tips are available at narpm.propertyboss.com.
Happy emailing! 📧

We’ve all had those days when our inboxes are full of email and not one of them is from a person we care to hear from – much less from an actual person. So, always ask yourself: “what would our clients and prospects like to see from us?” Not just “what do we want to tell them?” Ask yourself whether the message is one you would like to receive or would benefit from.