

Email Marketing for Libraries

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The possibilities of using electronic mail for marketing library services and products are enormous. This new venue offers an innovative, inexpensive, timely, and easy-to-distribute means of promotion. The main considerations are the means of **distribution** to use, the **format** of the marketing message, and the **content** of the message. However, before using this new technique, the pros and cons should be weighed...

Advantages of email marketing

- Inexpensive
- No mailing expenses
- Saves paper
- Easy to use
- Timely
- Can use URL links to bring client to the library's home pages
- Can use attachments for longer documents
- Easily saved by client
- Way to obtain feedback from client

Disadvantages of email marketing

- Impersonal (as opposed to phone calls, letters, or personal visits)
- Can be viewed as annoying by client
- Could be viewed as spam if permission to send is not obtained
- Can be deleted by mistake
- Long messages not usually read
- Not used by all clients (a significant percentage of clients must use email to make it effective)
- Not always read in a timely manner or at all
- May require the creation and maintenance of a distribution list



You have
library
mail!

Mass Broadcast

Broadcast messages are designed to reach all the institutional population that have email addresses. On some systems you can do this automatically, others require the assistance and permission of the system administrator as well approval from other administrative units.

Sending a broadcast message is the electronic equivalent of sending a flyer to everyone.

Advantages of mass broadcast:

- Wider distribution of your message inexpensively
- Timely (can reach a large group of people quickly - great for "just in time" promotion)
- Easy to do (no lists of email addresses to maintain)

Disadvantages of mass broadcast:

- More likely to trigger resentment or annoyance
- Institutional policy limits on use of the system
- Labor intensive to build and maintain large lists of email addresses if restricted from group broadcasts

Targeted Distribution

One of the first steps in thinking like a marketer is to divide your clientele into target audience segments. Each segment will have common interests, values, needs, or library-usage patterns. Targeted advertising is more likely to get a response.

Advantages of targeted distribution:

- More interest by clients since the message is tailored
- Increased usage of library services because the message will "hit the bullseye"

Disadvantages of targeted distribution:

- Need to maintain distribution lists with some categorization of information about the clients
- Can be time intensive to maintain lists
- More writing effort if different messages are sent to different segments

Client Databases:

Many libraries have an online catalog or circulation system such as Unicorn that can store email addresses, as well as other information on the client, such as department or status (faculty, resident, student, etc.). Such a system could be used for targeted distribution.

The UT Southwestern Library is experimenting with creating a client database using 'Contact Pro' software that can not only store address and status information, but also interests, library usage, messages, and client-staff interactions (e.g., suggestions, complaints.)

Distribution

Permission Marketing

This marketing model is built around the concept of "permission." Marketers try to persuade clients to agree to learn more about a library and its services. Permission marketing can also be combined with targeted distribution.

Advantages of permission marketing:

- Messages not regarded as unsolicited since clients have expressed interest
- Client attitude more positive
- Clients already interested in library services

Disadvantages of permission marketing:

- Distribution restricted to those clients who have already consented
- Follow-up marketing required to obtain new clients for list
- Maintenance needed for distribution lists
- Can be time intensive to maintain lists

Obtaining Permission:

The UT Southwestern Library is planning several ways of asking for permission. One of the questions on an upcoming Internet Users Survey will be whether the client is interested in receiving electronic notification of library products and services. An affirmative answer would constitute "permission." A check box will also be added to library registration forms where the client can indicate interest in this service. Also, a form on the Library's home page will allow the client to register for this service.

Listserv

A listserv is actually a special tool for permission marketing. It is an automated distribution list that may or may not be interactive. Most topical listservs are interactive discussion groups.

However, most library client listservs are not interactive. They are moderated listservs used primarily to distribute an electronic version of the library's newsletter.

Advantages of a listserv:

- Automated posting of messages
- Clients able to subscribe or unsubscribe themselves
- Clients already interested in library services
- Messages not regarded as unsolicited
- Client attitude more positive
- Provides venue for constructive criticism and discussion of library issues
- Communication with clients enhanced
- Less maintenance required for automated list

Disadvantages of a listserv:

- Unmoderated lists subject to disruption by severe critics or by inflammatory postings
- Censorship issues for interactive lists
- Moderators required for maintaining lists
- Distribution restricted to those clients who have already consented
- Follow-up marketing required to obtain new clients for list
- Maintenance needed for distribution lists

What other libraries are doing...

An August 1998 survey of medical library and Texas library web pages has turned up only one example of an interactive type of listserv: TCU LIB-L at Texas Christian University.

Only four other libraries were identified as having listservs although a majority of the home pages of medical and Texas libraries surveyed did have some type of electronic newsletter or news page. UT Southwestern Library is in the process of creating a listserv to serve primarily as a distribution list for an electronic newsletter.

Format

File Attachments

A file attachment can be a useful means of sending preformatted information, forms or audiovisuals. It can be attached to a brief message that whets the interest of the recipient but doesn't overwhelm with lengthy details. The document itself could be in .pdf, .HTML, spreadsheet, word processing format, etc. It could even be a picture or a sound or video clip!

Advantages of file attachments:

- Easy way to send formatted information

Disadvantages of file attachments:

- Compatible applications software required by recipient
- Not supported by all email systems
- Confusing to novice Internet users

Electronic Newsletters

Most libraries are already using a printed newsletter as a marketing and educational tool. It's an obvious step to convert this to the Internet.

- Can present many different topics
- Easily updated
- Copies easily retained by recipient
- Can reuse articles from print publications

Disadvantages:

- Longer length not always readable

What other libraries are doing...

An August 1998 survey of medical library and Texas library web pages shows that most have mounted an HTML or pdf version of the print newsletter on their home pages. However, very few have advanced to the next step of proactively distributing this information by email to their users by offering subscriptions.

What you want to communicate to the client is always the most important feature of the message. Try to think like a client. What would be the benefit to the client of your message?

An August 1998 survey of medical library and Texas library web newsletters shows a tremendous range of topics:

- Hours, holiday announcements
- Answers to client suggestions
- Announcements of classes
- Announcements of special events
- Construction progress
- Library plans
- Questionnaires, requests for feedback clients
- New resources and services
- Tips on existing resources and services
- Changes in existing resources and services
- New Internet sites
- Faculty publications
- Staff announcements
- Books reviews
- Answers to reference questions

Content

UT Southwestern Library is planning a prototype of a weekly electronic newsletter. These features are being considered for inclusion:

- Summaries of articles from UT Southwestern's *Information Times*, the joint newsletter published by Information Resources, Bioinstrumentation, Academic Computing Services, and the Library URL links to the more complete web version will be included. Most articles are new product or service announcements
- Hours and holiday announcements
- Library and Internet class announcements
- Announcements from the Library's "New This Week" web page
- Answers to client suggestions and complaints
- Announcement of the Site of the Week, with an URL link
- Recent biomedical news headlines, with an URL link to a more complete week's list

These are mainly features that have already been created for print or web publication, so that their reuse in email marketing would not place a severe demand on staff time and effort.