COURAGEOUS
STORYTELLERS

EMAIL NEWSLETTERS 101

By Jon Rogers

EMAIL NEWSLETTERS 101

A well-conceived church communication strategy will likely include an email newsletter to ensure people don't miss important events or initiatives at your church. **Before you open up your email application, there are a few fundamental things you need to consider:**

THE BASICS

☐ DETERMINE PURPOSE

Why are you starting a newsletter? What pain point is it meant to relieve? Consider developing multiple newsletters for various purposes versus just one all-encompassing email. Some people in your church family may just want to hear about upcoming events, some may prefer to get a Monday morning recap of the previous day's message, and others may want to know how they can be praying for people. Putting all that information into one email will overwhelm the reader and become noise.

☐ DETERMINE FREQUENCY

What is the balance between communicating meaningful information and overwhelming your congregation—or the staff member or volunteer charged with sending it?

☐ DETERMINE FROM WHOM THE NEWSLETTER WILL BE SENT

Clearly state the name of the church as the sender. Also determine the email address your message should come from. People might be more likely to open something from the lead pastor than from the church receptionist.

☐ DETERMINE BEST DAY/TIME TO EMAIL

According to national statistics, the optimal days and times for sending email are Tuesdays and Thursdays between 8 and 10 a.m. You can make that your starting point to make it easy, but the best time for **you** to send an email is when **your** congregation opens email. Survey your congregation or a smaller focus group to determine when you should send yours.

☐ CHOOSE AN EMAIL NEWSLETTER SOLUTION

Forget populating the BCC line with hundreds of emails! For a stellar church email newsletter, you'll want to sign up for an email marketing solution. There are some affordable products available to help get your message out, provide the tools you need to have a great-looking email, and even offer unique solutions like event registrations. These platforms not only help you manage your messages and email lists, but they also auto-magically assist you in following spam rules. Always check for nonprofit pricing!

DESIGN

Email marketing solutions will often provide basic templates to choose from or a template builder. Use or build the template that most closely matches the content you have to share.

☐ SIMPLE, CLEAR, EASY TEMPLATE

Look for or build templates with:

- plenty of white space (the blank space that frames the content)
- an easy-to-read font
- clear ways for people to take action, like big buttons

☐ BRAND CONSISTENCY

Use your church's logos and marks, taglines, and brand colors. Keeping your brand consistent in your email newsletter maintains the trust you've built with your overall brand. It affirms to your congregation that the newsletter is a legitimate communication from your church.

☐ THINK MOBILE

Two-thirds of all emails are read on mobile devices. That means your emails should be prepared with mobile in mind and tested on mobile devices. Further, consider your calls to action, as they should point to a mobile-friendly web page or form as well.

AUDIENCE/LIST

☐ CREATE A SYSTEM FOR ONGOING LIST BUILDING

Include on-ramps to your list both online (website sidebars, footers or pop-ups, and social media) and offline (guest cards and physical event signups). Be sure to include a place to ask people's permission to email them.

☐ SEGMENT YOUR LIST

Mine additional data (demographics) to build segments into your list that will allow you to reach appropriate audiences with relevant messaging. An email marketing solution will assist you with this. People will unsubscribe if they continually receive irrelevant emails.

☐ USE A CLEAN LIST

If you are activating an old list of subscribers again or compiling lists from different ministries in the church, filter the list through an email cleaning service. Bad or old email addresses and other things like complaints or spam reports begin to work against you. Sooner than later, email providers will start to send your messages to a spam folder—or even blacklist you.

☐ FOLLOW THE RULES

In the United States, the Federal Trade Commission instituted CAN-SPAM laws to establish a national standard for appropriate commercial email behavior and protect recipients from unwanted emails. Ignore these rules, and your email address, IP address, and/or domain can be blacklisted by users and spam filters. That means future emails from you will be undeliverable.

You'll know you're following CAN-SPAM rules if:

- ☐ **You're telling the truth.** Don't mislead your audience in any of your information, including your header, subject line, or reply-to address.
- ☐ **You have permission.** Recipients must have given you permission to email them. This is best accomplished by (but is not limited to) having an email sign-up form on your website and social media accounts.
- ☐ **You have an unsubscribe link/process.** There must be a way for recipients to opt out when they no longer wish to receive your emails. Requests to opt out must be honored within 10 business days.
- ☐ **You've included a location.** The message must include a valid physical postal address.

CONTENT

☐ CONSIDER YOUR VOICE

If your content looks, feels, or sounds vastly different than what your congregation is used to hearing from the platform, people simply won't respond the way they would if the content matched the voice they hear on Sunday morning. What personality, words, and phrases make up your church's "voice"?

☐ SUBJECT LINE

Your subject line is a big piece of your email. Often, it's the top reason people either open or scroll past the email entirely. Make it stand out and catch the attention of your subscriber, but avoid sounding like spam. Refrain from words you typically see in spam emails and you'll be fine (e.g., FREE, WINNER, subscribe, etc). There are free tools on the web to help you analyze your subject line and show you words to avoid. Open up your favorite search engine, and search for email subject line analyzers.

☐ MAKE CONTENT SCANNABLE

Use headings and subheadings to break up content and allow people to quickly find the information most meaningful to them. Your readers need to find relevant information in less than 12 seconds or they move on. Stay clear and concise.

BEFORE YOU HIT SEND

☐ SEND A TEST EMAIL

Send a test email to a test group that includes multiple people who are detail-oriented and can assist in catching mistakes like dates, times, etc.

AFTER YOU HIT SEND

☐ TRACK MEANINGFUL DATA

You'll want to define success and track progress based on the stated purpose of your email. Email marketing solutions will allow you to track metrics such as open rates, bounces (email addresses that get returned), clicks on links in the email, unsubscribes, spam reports, etc.

☐ ADJUST STRATEGY AS NEEDED

Open rates not what you would like? Methodically test different days and times when you send out the email and pay attention to fluctuation in open rates. Track what types of links get clicked on most to see what's most relevant to your congregation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Jon currently serves The Salvation Army Empire State Division as the director of communications and marketing after more than 10 years of full-time ministry within the local church. A five-time Creative Missions-ary, Jon is passionate about three things: functional digital tools, plaid shirts, and purposeful messaging.

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