



## Eight Ways to Improve E-mail Readership

LET'S FACE IT, MOST PEOPLE ARE LOOKING FOR REASONS NOT TO READ THE E-MAIL YOU SEND THEM. THIS IS DOUBLY TRUE IF ALL YOU SEND IS AN ADVERTISEMENT. IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN IMPROVING E-MAIL OPENING AND RESPONSE RATES, READ ON.

Marketing guru Ray Jutkins, a guy who knew how to write a message that people would read, often invoked "radio station" WII-FM. If it's not a hit there, it won't be a hit anywhere.

### What's In It For Me? (WII-FM)

THAT'S THE NUMBER ONE QUESTION THAT YOUR MESSAGE MUST ANSWER WITHIN THE FIRST FEW SECONDS. FAIL TO DO THAT AND YOUR MESSAGE WILL FAIL.

Anyone who's in business wants to improve return on investment for any kind of communication, not just traditional advertising. That's the WII-FM that I stated in the opening paragraph of this message: Better response.

No magic spells exist to improve opening rates, response rates, and ROI but there are several time-proven strategies. That's what I'd like to share with you now.

- **The strategy that's closest to magic is WII-FM.** Your message can't be about you; it must be about the reader. Nobody cares that you offer a product or service unless you make crystal clear to them what benefit this product or service provides. Nobody goes to the hardware store to buy a drill bit because drill bits are inherently desirable. People buy a drill bit because they want to create a hole. What do your prospects and clients want that you can provide?

- **Send more than an advertisement.** Offer readers something they never knew before. Give them a something that will make their lives easier or save money. This shouldn't involve the need to purchase your product or service. By doing this, you begin to position yourself as the expert, the person to come to when advice is needed.
- **Be regular.** Set a schedule with a deadline and stick to it. If you can't commit to mailing every week, commit to mailing every two weeks or every month.
- **Be not cute the subject line with.** I routinely receive messages with subject lines like "Bill, are you going?" or "This is outrageous!" My usual response is to delete them without reading. The subject of an e-mail is equivalent of a headline on a print story. Don't waste it!
- **Be objective.** Resist the urge to include a lot of self-serving ad speak. Stick to the soft-sell in e-mail newsletters. Write a news story, not a press release. If you have a success story that involves a client, tell that story from the client's point of view. Quote the client.
- **Make the message interactive.** Your e-mails will have a method for readers to contact you—a link to a website form, an e-mail link, or a phone number. But what else can you do to encourage response from readers? What can you offer that will be of use to the prospect or client? Would a survey work for your audience?
- **Don't go overboard on graphics.** The standard for e-mail today is HTML so it's easy to improve the appearance with (a limited range of) typefaces, and colors. Including your logo as a graphic is OK but many e-mail clients will block the image until the receiver approves display of graphics.
- **Send a multi-part message.** Every HTML message should be accompanied by a second plain-text part. Failing to include the plain-text part will cause some e-mail systems to reject the message as spam.



### A Real-Life Example

I WRITE A WEEKLY TECHNOLOGY REPORT CALLED TECHBYTER WORLDWIDE THAT EXAMINES HARDWARE, SOFTWARE, AND TRENDS THAT WILL INTEREST HOME USERS AND SOHO (SMALL OFFICE/HOME OFFICE) USERS.

The opening rate for TechByter Worldwide rarely drops below 50%, a figure that is considerably higher than the average for this market segment and the opening rate for this market segment is considerably higher than for most other segments.

On the other hand, advertising e-mails often have an opening rate between 1% and 2%. What's responsible for the high opening rate (and the equally high click-through rate to my website)?

I'm not the world's best writer. Not in the top 10. Not in the top 100. Maybe in the top 10,000. And there are people who know more about the subject than I do. But I'm always interested in what I write about and that enthusiasm is apparent in the weekly newsletter.

I've been sending the newsletter for more than a decade and it's had an accompanying podcast since 2006. Those who receive the newsletter requested it and that's an important consideration.

## But I Want Illustrations!

MAYBE SOMEDAY BUT NOT NOW. THE E-MAIL STANDARDS PROJECT HELPS DESIGNERS UNDERSTAND WHY WEB STANDARDS SHOULD BE OBSERVED WHEN CREATING E-MAIL MESSAGES AND HELPS DEVELOPERS OF E-MAIL PROGRAMS UNDERSTAND WHY RENDERING HTML PROPERLY IS IMPORTANT. SO FAR IT SEEMS THAT DESIGNERS HAVE ACCEPTED THE IDEA BUT THOSE WHO MAKE E-MAIL APPLICATIONS HAVEN'T.

Currently the E-mail Standards Project rates Microsoft Outlook and Google Mail, two of the most popular e-mail applications, as "poor" when it comes to rendering HTML e-mail. Until the developers of those applications succeed in properly rendering HTML there's little point in using the latest standards-based HTML for e-mail.

Tables are deprecated for positioning elements on websites but they're the only reliable way to position elements in e-mail. So reasonably accurate layout is possible but you should still avoid illustrations except for header and footer elements.

Some people think brevity is everything but marketing gurus know the truth. "It's not about being long or short," Ray Jutkins used to tell me. "It's about being boring or interesting." Give people something they want to read and they will read it.

## Three Extra Thoughts

IF YOU HAVEN'T YET DESIGNED THE NEWSLETTER, YOU HAVE AN ADVANTAGE BECAUSE YOU CAN DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME.

- **Choose a descriptive name.** If I were naming my technology newsletter today, I would probably choose something other than TechByter Worldwide because the name isn't as descriptive as it could be. When the program was on the radio, it was Technology Corner and the TBWW name was an extension of that.
- **Give people incentives.** To convince people to sign up for a newsletter, offer something useful for free. If you want people to visit your website, call you, or send an e-mail after reading your newsletter, offer them a reason to do so. And "more information" is not an adequate reason.
- **Proofreading are important.** Spelling and grammar errors are easy to overlook, particularly if you're in a hurry to meet your deadline. It's even easier if you are the writer, the editor, and the proofreader. When the editor is also the writer, the editor will read what the writer meant instead of what the writer wrote. As a proofreader, the writer will be so familiar with the material that it will be easy to miss mistakes. ☹

# More Options (and More Reasons) for Backup

THE COST OF ONLINE BACKUP SERVICES AND LARGE-CAPACITY USB DRIVES HAVE CHANGED THE BACKUP LANDSCAPE CONSIDERABLY IN THE PAST YEAR.

Multi-part backups are financially within reach of everyone.

The mantra is this: **Any file that exists in only one location is not backed up.**

- Back up files to another directory on your computer: No backup.
- Back up files to a separate hard drive in the computer: No backup.
- Back up files to a USB drive that's stored in the same building as the computer: No backup.

Consider using a disk imaging program such as Norton Ghost to store a copy of your boot drive off site and an online backup service such as Carbonite to back up all of your data files remotely.

I update the boot image and add all new and changed files every week to a USB drive that I

store at the office. Carbonite backs up all of my Word documents, Excel documents, Access databases, digital images, video files, and websites on a server in Boston.

Restoring files via the Internet would be slow so I consider Carbonite to be a second line of defense.

Any file that I'm working on will be backed up within seconds to a local USB drive. Because the drives that hold these files sit beside the computer, they're not really backup copies. But if something goes wrong with the desktop computer, they're a great safety net.

If needed, I can attach the USB drives to a notebook computer and continue working even if the desktop system crashes.

You may think of your computer as being expensive but it isn't. You may think of the applications running on your computer as being expensive but they aren't. You may not give much thought at all to the documents you've created but they are more valuable than the computer or the applications on the computer. ☹

