

Digital Messaging

Email, Text Messages and Twitter

Learning Objectives. This chapter examines how to:

- Tap the strengths of 3 major digital messaging tools.
- Write effective email, text and Twitter messages
- Identify the 5 major parts of an email message and how to use them
- Design email for delivery on PCs or mobile devices
- Reach audiences using short messages via texting and Twitter
- Create landing pages as destinations where message recipients can go to take action
- Manage and assess digital messaging programs

Overview

Digital messaging is the most basic form of digital promotion, where organizations “push out” information to target audiences using email, text messages and microblog posts.

Messaging takes three forms:

- **Bulk messages** sent to multiple recipients. Examples include *email blasts* or *email broadcasts*, text messages sent to compiled lists of recipients, and Twitter alerts sent to “followers.” These are usually carefully crafted stand-alone messages designed to prompt specific actions.
- **Automated email or text messages** sent to individual recipients to acknowledge a query or transaction. The texts of these messages are usually standardized and generated by *auto-responder* software available with many email programs and automated marketing systems. Messages frequently drop in personalized information drawn from a database (such as details of an order placed). Digital promotion managers are typically involved in crafting these messages to assure that key promotional messages are correctly included and to assure a proper tone; operations personnel then oversee day-to-day production and distribution.
- **Individual messages** sent to specific individuals to solicit their involvement or respond to queries. The content of each message is highly customized, and the writing style and tone can vary considerably. Sometimes senders follow prototypes or templates that have been created for specific situations, such as congratulatory messages, complaint responses, etc.

Email

Emails, specifically single-subject letters or correspondence, have been used for promotional purposes since the early 1990s.

Despite promotional inroads by other messaging tools and social media, email remains the number-one digital marketing tool used by for promotional purposes by businesses, governments and not-for-profit organizations. The time people spend with email has actually increased in recent years (up by 15 minutes per day since 2010), largely because of adoption of email-compatible smartphones. More than 60% of people say email is “very important” in their work, especially those who work in an office.

Today, 95% of email messages are deliverable because the sender uses valid email addresses. Meanwhile just under one-third of all emails are actually opened, and the average click-through rate for people taking action is around 4-5% for all opened emails. (Rates vary by topic, offer and sender.) Nonetheless, email marketing has proven to quite effective and efficient – and can generate responses, if used correctly and targeted to the proper audience.

Advantages of Email. Email’s advantage over both text messaging and microblogging lies in its ability to send complex messages that cannot be fitted within the limits of a short communication – including messages with lengthy texts, complex illustrations, forms and attachments. Users can actually complete transactions using forms *within* the email or be referred to a simple *landing page* (see discussion at end of chapter).

Email also is comparatively easy to create and inexpensive to distribute. Email allows for immediate responses and is highly measurable in terms of the audiences reached and responses generated. Organizations can draw upon databases of customers, members, donors or other groups (such as students) to create email lists. Email also acts as great equalizer that shrinks the promotional advantages previously enjoyed by large organizations with big advertising budgets. Any size organization can engage in email marketing.

Disadvantages of Email. One of email’s disadvantages is the sheer volume of competing messages that many people receive. The inboxes of many users are simply inundated with email – including an average of 25 promotional emails per week just from retailers (about 38 per week during the holidays).

Marketers compound the problem by not being selective about their target audiences and sending too much mail to the same targets. As a result, some legitimate or worthy email is confused with junk mail. Google’s Gmail program attempts to help users sort incoming mail by creating tabs and automatically separating promotional message– but might only compound the problem. Meanwhile, emailers have witnessed increased resistance from the public. Some users have abandoned email altogether in favor of other messaging tools (a condition coined *email bankruptcy*).

Creating and Receiving Email. Email is created by senders using a wide range of email software programs and read by users on PCs or mobile devices using special software programs known as *email clients*. The most popular email services for individuals are operated by third-party entities and include Google's Gmail, MSN's Hotmail and Outlook, Yahoo! Mail and AOL. However, employees of various organizations rely on proprietary or controlled-access email services domiciled on their employers' computer network. Microsoft Outlook is the most popular installed software. Unlike Web browsers, email clients vary considerably in terms of their functionality and capabilities—an important consideration when designing email marketing programs.

Solicited Versus Unsolicited Email

Emails can be categorized three ways:

- **Unsolicited promotional messages.** These messages, pejoratively known as *spam*, are generated when organizations are prospecting for new customers and involve information that might or might not be relevant to recipients. Spam filters on many personal computers and mobile devices screen out suspected junk emails (usually identified when large volumes of mail are generated from a single sender and feature words commonly used in sales promotion materials). However, sending unsolicited emails can be effective if the message or the offer immediately resonates with the recipient.
- **Authorized messages** are email messages where the recipient has granted permission for the sender to send announcements, special offers, etc. *Permission marketing* involves giving people the opportunity to “opt in” or “opt out” of email. Usually people are given the chance to indicate their mail preferences when they join an organization, sign up for a service, subscribe to a publication, or respond to a digital promotion. Evidence suggests that recipients who “opt in” are more likely to be favorably disposed toward messages and less likely to complain. However, people often opt in to more email lists than they might eventually want or can easily manage on a daily basis. Or their needs or interests change. Thus these authorized messages can become a nuisance (sometimes referred to “bacn” instead of spam). Thus allowing people to *unsubscribe* can be useful.
- **Expected, required or society messages** involve notices, confirmations or responses to queries that are distributed to key publics of an organization whether or not the recipient has granted permission. Indeed, some email recipients would be miffed if they were not notified of events such as the closure of a facility or could sue an organization for failure to notify customers or others of a dangerous situation.

Email Formats

Email messages use one of four graphical formats:

- **All-text messages** were the original form of email where messages appeared as simple plain text using a standard default font, single spaced with line wrapping, and with no styling (changes in type size, underlining, bolding or italics). The earliest DOS-based email systems relied on the American Standard Code for Information

Interchange (ASCII) composed of Latin letters, Arabic numerals and the common punctuation marks. Today, ASCII continues to be supported by virtually all email clients and remains how most email (and HTML documents) are transmitted. (More complex code systems are used for international emails that do not use Latin-based character sets--Arabic, Cyrillic, Chinese, etc.)

- **HTML-based messages** are essentially text messages embedded with HTML tags that instruct Web browsers how the various elements in the message should be displayed. Senders can create special effects by varying the type face and size, color and styling. As with regular HTML documents, text can be accompanied by visuals (images or graphics) in .gif, .jpg or .png formats. Content ideally is displayed against a plain background (white is suggested) to minimize display problems and to enhance legibility. HTML-based emails generally are more attractive and engaging, and generate higher response compared all-text messages. Most email clients give users the option of sending messages as HTML only, text only, or both.
- **Graphical layouts** use HTML and other graphical programs, such as Adobe Illustrator or Photoshop, to create single-panel emails that look like online fliers, posters or ads. The format is especially popular for promoting products and events and emphasizes powerful graphics and illustrations. Graphical layouts are generally more complicated to produce and pose possible problems for some mail clients in terms of slower loading times and proper display. But be watchful of creating emails that look like display ads: Evidence suggests that emails are most effective using an equal combination of text and graphics.
- **Video emails** are emerging as a message format, but are not yet used widely because of the complexity of producing videos and because many major email client programs do not support video. Although links to videos posted on Web servers have been included in regular emails for a long time, video emails are HTML-based messages that embed a video player directly in the file. No website connection is required. Recipients can push a play button to watch a short streaming message that is usually 1.5 minutes or less. Best practices for video email include always indicating "video" in the message's subject line, explaining what the video portrays, highlighting the value of the video in the accompanying text, and encouraging viewers to share the video with others. Automatic play is *not* recommended.

Uses of Email in Digital Promotion

Digital promotion managers can use their imaginations to identify all the possible ways to use email as part of a campaign.

The four most common subjects for bulk emails are:

- **Product announcements and offers** – Marketers use email to announce a new product or perhaps a special offer related to a new or existing product. Product announcements typically are the most common reason that marketers send unsolicited emails in an effort to prospect for buyers.

- **Cross-selling, up-selling current customers** -- Organizations use their email lists (along with client information stored in organization databases) to seek additional business from existing customers. Offers can involve new product announcements, but also often pertain to already existing products that might be of interest to customers, including upgrades of products or services that the recipient already uses.
- **Invitations or event announcements** -- Organizations can invite existing customers or members to special events that might be of interest – and can usually extend invitations to unaffiliated individuals without alienating the recipient if the event would reasonably be of interest or is free. People with an interest in the topic actually appreciate being invited. Emails also are used to invite recipients to support social or political causes to make financial donations or volunteer contributions of time and talent.
- **Updates** – News and information about products, services or activities that would be valuable for customers, members or others to know.

Transactional emails, or routine email correspondence between an organization and recipients during course of everyday business, are valuable vehicles that can be used to support many of the same purposes for which specially produced bulk emails are created. These communications are ideal ways to reinforce the organization's branding, highlight current activities, and underscore key messages. Digital promotional managers should be involved in crafting and periodically reviewing/updating these two types of correspondence:

- **Confirmation/acknowledgements** include routine correspondence sent whenever an individual places an order or completes a transaction. Confirmations follow a “moments of truth” when users have taken action – and are ideal chances to bolster the recipient's relationship with the organization. A variation on acknowledgements involves online merchants sending an email whenever a customer suspends a transaction or abandons an online shopping cart – with an invitation to reconsider the opportunity.
- **Statements and invoices/receipts** delivered via email are also important online communications opportunities as more and more people move to electronic bill paying and receiving monthly and quarterly financial statements online. Organizations can incorporate promotional messages that foster customer relations and/or cross-promote services or current offers.

Email is especially valuable when dealing with current customers, members or donors who have demonstrated an interest in the organization, its products or services.

- Existing customers spend two-thirds more online than first-time purchasers and cost about 10 times less to reach.
- Transactional emails, such as confirmations and statements and invoices, enjoy high “open” rates and are often under-utilized promotional opportunities.
- Email is a useful way to make an organization's best customers or largest donors feel special. Organizations frequently send special promotional messages to their most frequent customers or best supporters. Emails can feature thank-you notes for purchases, special purchase opportunities, VIP services, free upgrades, early access to special sales, invitations to special events, and awards of bonus points in tandem with sales promotions.

- Many existing customers *want* to be notified via about offers, including promotions advertised in public media, on websites and in social media.

The Five Parts of an Email Messages

Letters, memos and fliers are the most common forms of email and share the common characteristic of focusing on a *single topic* or desired action. Alternatively, *e-newsletters* can be a valuable tool for periodically contacting important constituent via email and generally feature multiple topics or offers that appeal to different recipients. E-newsletters are a mainstay of e-publishing (see Chapter 7).

Writing effective email letters and memos focusing on a single topic requires carefully crafting each key component found in the typical email message, not just the main text copy. Special attention needs to be paid to the header, opening, closing and footer.

Experts use different nomenclature to describe these components of email messages, but the principles are the same. Not every component listed here has to appear in every email. Follow these tips for success:

Header -- Appears in the recipient's inbox or directory of incoming messages. Attracts attention and prompts the recipient to open the mail. Also appears at the top of the opened message and can work in tandem with the email's body copy as the recipient reads the message.

"From" Line – Familiarity and positive affinity with the sender encourages opening. Use a personal name (with title, if needed) whenever possible.

"To" Line – Should be addressed solely to the individual, not a long list of addressees. Include the person's name (not just email address) if possible.

"Subject" Line – Should capture attention, communicate the main benefit, and possibly provide an incentive to open the mail (without appearing like spam). See sidebar.

Opening – Grabs attention, involves the reader, and makes a critical linkage between the recipient's needs, concerns or interests and the message or organization.

Headline or Banner– Should telegraph the offer or proposition. Using a graphical treatment can create interest.

The Ever-Important Subject Line

Subject lines are arguably the most important element in an email – the key to whether the email is actually opened. Subject lines also telegraph important information to recipients who do not actually open the mail.

Use the subject to capture attention and provide a *reason why* to open the mail – all in 37-45 characters (15-25 characters are suggested for mobile emails).

The verbiage should be unique for each message, reinforce the brand, and possibly reference a recent action or encounter. As possible, capture the recipient's curiosity.

Most important: Guard against or test *spammy words* that are a turn off to recipients and can trip email spam filters. Before writing a copy, review one or more of the online lists of troublesome spam phrases, such as *50% off, Cheap, Call Now, and 100% free* ,

Also avoid blank lines, all caps, hyperbole, sexually explicit references, words associated with online scams (such as *weight loss* or *low rates*), and obfuscated or otherwise misspelled words.

Salutation – Personalization prompts the reader's involvement and improves readership.
Lead Sentence (the "lede") – Must engage and prompt the reader to continue reading.

Main Text

Proposition – Clearly summarizes the offer and stresses a key benefit. Limit to one topic.

Supporting Information – Provides proof of claims about key benefit. Also can include secondary benefits, features of product or service, or testimonials that serve as selling points.

Details – Provides required information to fully understand the proposition and take action.

Close

Call to Action (CTA) – Although some mails are purely informational, many emails aim to prompt a response. A good call to action *explicitly* states what reader should do, whether online or offline, and is specific and easy to complete. Examples: *Read More, Subscribe, Forward to a Friend, Contact Us, Donate Today, Visit our Website.*

Signature/Sign-Off – A personal contact name with title is preferred.

Link to a "Landing Page" or Email Address – Make responding easy!

Footer – Appears *below* the main message and signature, usually in a smaller, yet legible font.

Opt-Out – A link for readers to unsubscribe from the sender's mailing list.

Mandatory – Legal disclosures required or desired to avoid misunderstandings. Legal disclosures should be as brief as possible and not so long that it overpowers the main message appearing above the close.

Privacy Policy – A link to information about how information provided in response to the email might be used. Various marketing organizations mandate member firms to provide such a disclosure (see Chapter 16).

Whitelist/Safelist Request – Requests recipients to add the sender to their address book and thus avoid future messages being bounced as junk mail.

Details – Other useful ordering, delivery or offer-related information not necessary to include in the main message but important for the recipient to understand – and to avoid later customer service/customer relations problems.

Optional:

Preheader – One or more short hyperlinks in small type that appear at the top when the email message opens. Preheaders are designed to facilitate message effectiveness, but not distract the reader from the main message.

Open as a Web Page – Allow recipient to switch to a specially created web page version of the message in the event of display problems using email.

Switch to Mobile Version – Allows reading an optimized version designed for smartphones (see below)

Add to Address Book – Placed in the preheader instead of the footer to avoid messages from the sending being trapped in a spam filter (instead of being placed in footer).

Forward to a Friend -- An invitation and email link to share the message with family or friends and thus extend the message's audience (reach).

Writing Effective Emails

Successful emails depend on sending the *right offer* to the *right person* at the *right time* using the *right message*. Stated another way, it's critical to have a relevant or useful offer or proposition, targeted to the right audience, delivered at a propitious moment,

packaged effectively. The three principal challenges are to get recipients to 1) open the email, 2) read and understand the email, and 3) take action, if applicable.

Here are suggestions to improve the effectiveness of both bulk and individual emails:

Headers: Clearly and accurately identify the sender and the topic. Both are critical for getting recipients to open an email message. Recipients also use the name and subject lines to retrieve saved messages.

Replies: If responding to another person's email but addressing a different topic, be sure to *change* the subject line. If sending a message to multiple recipients, suggest that people respond to you *directly* using "Reply" instead of "Reply All." Or provide a separate "Reply to" address.

Length: Emails ideally should not exceed 1-2 screens of text. Avoid attachments whenever possible.

Sentences and Paragraphs: Keep them short. Keep sentences under 15 words and paragraphs no longer than 30 words. Paragraphs should be a maximum of 4-5 lines, with space between paragraphs. Left-justify all text; do not indent the first line of paragraphs.

Quoting: For replies to individual emails, include your response on the top. Use quoted material from previous emails sparingly within the text -- only as necessary for clarity.

HTML versus ASCII: Whenever possible, send emails in both HTML and ASCII formats. Text-only versions should avoid tabs, indents and bolding. Use double dashes (not bullets) at the beginning of lines to create lists. Use asterisks (in lieu of italics) to emphasize a particular phrase (****today****). Many email clients generate all-text versions automatically.

Signature lines: Sign emails with a personal name and key contact information, a *signature file*, or an *electronic business card* available on your email program. Tip: Beware of catchy phrases or quotations in signatures that might be inappropriate for a particular recipient.

Tone: Be conscious of your reader as well as your organization's culture. Email provides few nonverbal cues—so it's important to be clear and avoid misunderstandings. Remember: People scan emails in a hurry—and form impressions quickly. Be watchful of ambiguous references, humor, slang, euphemisms and provincial cultural references. Using all caps suggests the sender is screaming at the recipient.

Emoticons and Email Slang: Smiley faces (☺), abbreviations created with punctuation (:-), and commonly used slang (e.g. BTW—"by the way") should be used in informal correspondence only. Generally, avoid them *except* when appealing to particular niche audiences.

Hyperlinks: Use hyperlinks to refer readers to details that don't easily fit within the email, such as product descriptions, Privacy Policies, or landing pages. Clearly label the link with a descriptive term or the actual URL to which recipient will be directed.

Underscore hyperlinks so they are clearly visible—don't rely on a cursor hovering over the link for readers to see it. Avoid "click here." Instead, conjure up for readers a mental image of the action to be taken or the information to be provided.

Spell- and Grammar-Check: Proof emails carefully. Poor mechanics lower perceptions of the sender's credibility and can create misunderstandings. Don't embarrass your client organization.

Accuracy: Organizational emails are subject all the same truth-in-advertising laws that apply to other communications. Verify facts and avoid any suggestion of deception.

20 Tips for Writing Emails and Other Online Content

1. Users should be able to scan content quickly and easily. Users don't "read" online.
2. Material should be concise, intelligible, appealing and credible.
3. Present the most important information at the beginning.
4. Less is more in all cases of online writing.
5. Remember the newspaper rule: Address the *Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How*.
6. Use lists, bullets, headings and other emphasis tools to attract attention and to guide readers through material.
7. Hyperlinks should contain descriptive terms or keywords.
8. Organize content into logical, easily scanned sections.
9. Sections should be able to stand alone in terms of a reader's understanding.
10. In most cases, a conversational style of writing works best.
11. Use precise, vivid words. Active voice is more effective than passive voice.
12. Know your readers – their needs, concerns and interests.
13. Use the correct tone and style for your typical readers – and the message.
14. Use plain language. Avoid *marketese* (empty promotional hype) and industry *jargon* (unless part of the regular lexicon of the recipient).
15. Tell readers what actions to take.
16. Be clear about your goal (what you want to achieve and what readers want)
17. Focus on the *benefit* of an offer or proposition (not just details or mere features). Address the proverbial question of all readers – "*What's in it for me?*" (WIIFM).
18. Solve readers' problems and answer their questions.
19. Good writing for readers is good writing for search engines.
20. Content should pass the AIDAS test: grab attention, strengthen interest, stimulate desire, prompt action, and instill satisfaction.

Adapted from David Mill (2007), *Content is King: Writing and Editing Online*, Burlington, MA: Elsevier/Butterworth-Heinemann. Visit the author's website: <http://www.writingediting.co.uk>.

Designing Email for PCs Versus Mobile

About half of all emails today are opened on a personal computer and half are opened on mobile devices. This requires marketers to thoughtfully consider the appearance and layout of email messages. Importantly, the open rate on mobile devices can be three times the rate for the same email delivered on a PC, depending on the type.

Most emails today are created using basic HTML codes, but the coding used for email is simplistic (primitive) compared the sophisticated coding for modern websites. Why? Many versions of email client software programs are in use today, and many of them do not support the advanced design features commonly used for Web pages. For example, Gmail, Hotmail, AOL and Microsoft Outlook actually strip out much HTML code. Quirky differences also exist for how emails are rendered on different email clients.

As a result, experts advise that the best strategy is to stick with a simple, basic design – as if it were still the year 2000.

Email design is complicated by the different screen configurations of PCs and mobile devices.

Responsive design, which is popular among web designers to render content according to the device on which a web page appears (PC, tablet or smartphone) is slowly being adopted by email marketers – a process impeded by the numerous ways that different email client software can display messages.

Email marketers today thus pursue two options:

- Make email formats *scalable* so that the same message can be read on both PCs and mobile devices. This reflects a “mobile-first” strategy and involves shortening the length of the message, simplifying the graphics, increasing type sizes, and increasing the size of call-to-action buttons. Notably, smartphones such as Apple’s iPhones allow users to zoom in on text that otherwise might not be read easily. However, for some complex communications, or when lengthy attachments are essential, this is not a viable option.
- Produce *two versions* of the message—one for delivery on PCs and one for mobile. Full-length emails for PCs are routinely distributed today with preheaders (see above) that enable mobile users to switch to a mobile

Power of Email Personalization

The integration of email systems with organizational data bases and other data sources allows organizations to make emails more engaging and effective through *personalization* (also known as the use the *adaptive content*).

Various pieces of personally identifying information can easily be embedded in open data fields within emails -- personal names, account numbers and balances, and milestone dates. However, emails can be tailored to individual recipients in a variety of other ways. Senders can:

- Alter the product, offer or price based on past online behavior, the frequency or pattern of purchases, demographic characteristics, local weather conditions, or inventory levels.
- Include local references, graphics or images specific to the recipient’s gender or geographic location.
- Move the recipient to specific higher levels of product purchases (imputed from past behavior). This can advance recipients toward the next reward in a loyalty program.
- Suggest more cost-efficient pricing options based on past spending patterns.
- Customize the message based on timing – by including live count-down clocks or timed reminders about impending deadline.
- Include the appropriate name, photo and contact information for the recipient’s agent or sales representative.
- Tailor the message based on the number or nature of previous contacts with the organization or prior exposure to promotional messages.

version that is condensed and optimized for smartphones. In turn, mobile versions can refer recipients to a website that contains the full message.

Emarketers have the option of creating HTML code from scratch but also can purchase *templates* featuring simple designs with WYSIWYG (*what you see is what you get*) capabilities. Marketers can write copy and insert graphics, and the required HTML tags are inserted automatically. Major email production and distribution vendors can simplify the design process and offer both email letter and newsletter templates, or will develop custom designs for customers. Examples include Constant Contact, Mail Chimp, Cvent, iContact, and Vertical Response, to name a few.

Emails Delivered on PCs: Here are some basic design guidelines for standard, full-length emails delivered on a PC:

- Although modern computer screens are wider, page widths should be limited to 500-650 pixels in order to accommodate the majority of email clients. Narrower line lengths are also easier to read.
- Key content should appear in the top 3 inches and can be viewed by users whose email client displays the message in a preview pane.
- Messages with plain light backgrounds, dark type, and high-contrast graphics are best for legibility and printing. Many mail programs do not render background images.
- Use a variety of text elements and type sizes to help organize the material, including a strong headline, subheads, body copy, captions, and footer text. Limit the design to three type faces. Use color to highlight headlines and call attention to action buttons or links.
- A strong visual (graphic or photo) or headline can draw the reader into the message. Images should be hosted on a separate website and use a simple hyperlink in the email. Users should be able to click on the both the image and any explanatory label or caption. Inclusion of a compelling and descriptive <alt> tag will assure a default text is displayed if the visual cannot be displayed. Avoid animations—these are not supported by most email clients and can be annoying.
- Keep graphics simple—email is not the place for highly styled design. The default setting on Google Gmail and Microsoft Outlook is to not display graphics, unless the recipient clicks to see them.
- Email software programs only read HTML beginning below a <body> tag. The entire email message should be embedded within a single HTML table and use inline styles. Avoid most advanced CSS tools (style classes, shortcuts, float or position options). Nested tables, Java script, pixel spacers, table cell padding, spliced images, and unnecessary code (such as generated by Microsoft Word) raise havoc with the proper rendering of emails.

Emails Delivered on Mobile Devices: Some basic design guidelines for mobile emails delivered on a smartphone:

- Graphics, logos and banners can delivered to cellphones but need to be simple and resized to appear on a small screen. Unnecessary graphics take up valuable screen space and should be eliminated.
- A simple, one-column vertical layout is most functional.

- Plain, sans serif text is easiest to read on most smartphones. Use 14-point body type and 20- or 22-point headlines. Screens typically display only 20-40 characters per line, and only 12-15 lines per screen.
- Subject lines should “frontload” keywords in the first 3-4 words.
- Shorter messages enjoy better readership and generate better responses. Scrolling discourages readers from reading the full text of a long message.
- Highlight key ideas at top – in the first 12-15 lines that will appear on the first screen.
- Be brief and direct. Sentences and paragraphs should not extend more than a couple of lines on the screen display. Eliminate unnecessary words and descriptors.
- Recipients should be invited to respond using a clearly labeled button or hyperlink to a website or landing page. Shortened web addresses can be created using free URL shortening services such as tinyurl.com or bitly.com and can help conserve valuable space. Include a CTA at both the top and bottom of the message.
- Provide a click-to-call link to automatically place a toll-free call, if available.
- Target landing pages (see end of chapter) should be optimized for easy viewing on mobile devices. Provide simplified ways for recipients to take action.
- Promotional messages should prominently reinforce how simple and easy it is for mobile users to order, obtain information or take action online.
- Provide a text-only version for email clients that only display text.

Integrating Email and Social Media

With the popularity of social media, an important strategy for emailers is to consider how email should be deployed in tandem with social media. One 2014 study found that receiving email increased the response rate for a social media promotions by an impressive 16%. Here are ideas for integrating the new approaches:

- Coordinate schedules so that promotions coincide.
- Use Twitter to alert users to a major forthcoming email or news announcements.
- Focus on a consistent message, but differentiate the voice consistent with the conventions appropriate for each tool.
- Embed social sharing buttons in emails.
- Use social media to call attention to important emails sent to all customers, members or donors. Enable social media users to access the message via a hyperlink to a website or landing page where the email is posted.
- Use emails to drive traffic to social media venues
- Include URLs and invite email recipients to like, share or comment via Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn on posts.
- Feature images of emails and make references to recent emails/email offers in social media posts.
- Tie in social media activities to customer data bases, and then, for example, send a welcome email to a new Twitter follower
- Include email opt-in buttons in Facebook, LinkedIn and other social media venues.

Text Messaging

Bulk text messaging by organizations initially waned in popularity with the widespread adoption of smartphones that permitted easy access to mobile email. However, text messaging has enjoyed a recent resurgence as an option in many promotional programs.

A 2014 study found that 81% of American consumers surveyed *preferred* receiving notifications via text messages compared to mobile apps. Consumers also confirmed they would open a text message *sooner* than an email. Text messaging also provides an important way to use mobile technologies to reach the one-quarter of Americans who still carry feature phones (which only provide voice and text capabilities).

SMS: How Texting Works: Text messaging employs *short messaging service* (SMS) software created specifically for cellphones. SMS relies primarily on plain text and operates on an *asynchronous* basis by sending messages that can be read immediately or archived in an inbox and later read, deleted, forwarded or saved. (Note: SMS differs from real-time or *synchronous instant messaging* and chat services. IM and chats are primarily designed to facilitate person-to-person interactions among individuals who are online simultaneously.)

Advantages. Similar to email, text messages can be directed to compiled lists of recipients, sent periodically, and targeted geographically as part of a coordinated campaign. Both emails and text messages are reasonably immediate, inexpensive and can be personalized. Text message responses often are more immediate than email and are acted upon within 20 minutes of receipt. Text messaging is considered less intrusive, and can be integrated with photo messaging and geo-targeting based on a user's location. Importantly, cellphone-based text messages can reach people on the go without access to the Web.

Writing Text Messages

Text messages are limited to 160 characters and spaces, or roughly 1.5-2 lines of typewritten copy. Be succinct. By necessity, promotional text messages are brief and direct and often *begin* with a *call to action* followed by a short explanation why message is being sent. Example: "Call now. Time is running out to...."

Although popular in personal texting to conserve space and keystroking, avoid abbreviations in promotional messages for most organizations. Cryptic terms such as 2, 4, B, C, R, U, GR8, LOL, NO1 or BTW can be confusing. Emoticons ("smiley faces" -- ☺ ☹ -- and symbols constructed out of text characters such as :-D for laughing) might not be familiar to message recipients.

Non-essential punctuation and spacing (apostrophes, dashes, commas, etc.) can be eliminated when writing promotional text messages. But be sure such shortcuts don't compromise comprehension of a message by recipients.

Text Message Distribution

Similar to firms that offer emailing services, *SMS aggregators* are firms that specialize in the creation, distribution, monitoring, and processing of responses to large-scale text messaging programs. These services serve as intermediaries between organizations that want to send bulk text messages and cellphone service providers and can assure the success of text messaging marketing programs. Among their services, SMS aggregators match a recipient's cellphone number (from a client's database) to the appropriate cellphone network.

Text messaging within the United States requires having a ten-digit telephone number for the recipient (area code+prefix+number). International messaging requires the additional use of a country code. Compiling mobile phone numbers is the typically the responsibility of the sender, not an SMS aggregator.

Longer messages can be parsed up into separate 160-word segments. But this process (known as *concatenation*) should be avoided. Users are annoyed by receiving multiple messages or can become confused if the delivery of later parts is delayed.

Individual short emails can be sent as text messages to individual cellphone users by addressing the message to the recipient's ten-digit cellphone number at the designated email address of the cellphone service provider (but only if the service provider is known). Messages are still limited to 160 characters and spaces. Sites for the largest cellphone networks are listed below (verify possible changes):

AT&T - cellnumber@txt.att.net
Verizon - cellnumber@vtext.com
T-Mobile - cellnumber@tmomail.net
Sprint PCS - cellnumber@messaging.sprintpcs.com
Virgin Mobile - cellnumber@vmobl.com
US Cellular - cellnumber@email.uscc.net
Nextel - cellnumber@messaging.nextel.com

Text Message Replies and Short Codes

Whereas email usually prompts recipients to respond using a button or hyperlink contained in the message, text message respondents also can be directed to "Reply," "Forward" or "Call" using their cellphone.

A popular technique is to retain through an SMS aggregator a shared or dedicated five-digit or six-digit *short code* where wireless users can respond. Example: "Text DONATE to 66473." (Five or six digits are the standard in the United States; systems vary in other countries.) SMS aggregators also can arrange for purchases or contributions made on a

Text Messaging Apps

A recent development in text messaging is the popularity of mobile apps that allow people to send messages to others directly and thus bypass the SMS provided by mobile service providers. Examples include WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and WeChat.

Although intended to let users engage in live person-to-person *conversations*, several of these chat apps already enable organizations to send microblog-like messages to followers on a paid or unpaid basis (see the discussion of Snapchat, Kik and LINE in Chapter 9).

As the number of users increases, it is likely that one or more chat apps will add bulk text messaging capabilities. However, until these services allow distribution of bulk messages to recipients *across* multiple apps, the prospects for bulk text messaging using chat apps is limited – at least for now.

cellphone to be billed directly to a recipient's cellphone. For details, see the website for the Common Short Codes Administration (CSCA), which oversees the assignment of numbers.

Microblogging: Twitter

Twitter is considered by many people to be a form of social media. However, Twitter is also a frequently used as a *broadcast messaging tool* to supply very short updates and offers to a Twitter user's followers. Because about 20% of Americans subscribe to the service, Twitter must be considered as a messaging alternative used in tandem with or in lieu of email or text messaging. (For a fuller discussion of Twitter as a social media and paid promotional tool, see Chapter 9.)

Tweeting requires setting up an account with the microblog service (www.twitter.com) and permits users to distribute and receive messages. Tweets have traditionally only appeared on the Twitter streams (news feeds) of people who follow the sender. In 2015, Twitter will begin distributing *paid* Promoted Tweets to selected users based on algorithms that suggest the message would be relevant to the user (comparable to Suggested Posts on Facebook news feeds).

People use Twitter to share news about themselves and receive updates from friends. They also can use Twitter to shop, to obtain updates about current events, and to search for information and sources.

Beyond broadcasting messages, organizations can use Twitter as a direct response tool to prompt people to take actions, such as visit a website, download a mobile app, take advantage of a special offer or buy products online. Although organizations do not often encourage individual replies to their messages because of the sheer volume of responses that might be required, organizations regularly encourage Tweet recipients to *retweet* (share) the message with others who follow them – an important way to extend a message's reach.

Twitter Messages

Twitter messages allow a maximum of 140 characters and spaces (15-25 words), and thus is akin to text messaging. However, Twitter is an *Internet-based* (not cellphone-based) system that can be accessed via PCs, tablets or smartphones.

Twitter uses unique messaging conventions that users need to understand. (See Twitter.com's Help Center for definitions and details.) Some of the most important ideas to know are:

@username – When signing up, users are assigned a user name (also known as a *Twitter handle*). The @ symbol followed by a username (with no space) indicates a user and serves as a link to the user's profile. The user's handle and thumbnail photo appear with each tweet.

@Mention -- Include the @ tag a whenever referencing other known Twitter users within messages. Encourage others to mention you, as appropriate. Users are notified anytime their user name is mentioned in tweet by others.

#Hashtag – A hashtag consists of a hash mark preceding a term (without a space) and indicates the topic of the message. A hashtag thus serves as a keyword that facilitates searches for other tweets on the same topic.

Hyperlinks – Connect Tweet recipients to websites, landing pages and other venues on the World Wide Web. For messaging purposes, this is usually to be a website where the recipient can obtain more information. (For sales purposes, Twitter has focused on creating tools—known as *Twitter cards*--for sponsors of paid Promoted Tweets where people can place orders or take other actions without leaving the site.)

Retweets – Involves forwarding or resending a message to all of a user's followers. Referred to as an *RT* in tweets. A retweet begins:
RT@usernameoforiginalsender.

Reply (also referred to as @Replies) – A hyperlink accompanying each post allows the user to respond to a tweet. A reply can be seen by all Twitter users. Reply messages begin: *@senderoforiginalmessage.*

Direct Messages – A separate Messages link allows sending private messages (or responses) between people who follow one another. A direct message is abbreviated as *DM* in tweet texts. Messages begin: *d usernameofsender.*

Favorites – Indicates tweets that a user likes and has saved. Anyone can see a user's Favorites.

Although more space is provided, best practice suggests creating Tweets that are about 100 characters and spaces. This provides space within a shared message for users to add comments, hashtags and mentions when retweeting and still remain with the 140-character-and-spaces limit.

Uses of Twitter

Twitter offers organizations valuable opportunities to communicate short, timely messages to important constituents. Beyond providing updates and offers, Twitter can maintain an organization's salience (awareness) in the minds of users and enhance an organization's reputation. Exposure on Twitter also can *amplify* exposure or draw attention to other online communications, such news releases, email announcements or blog posts. (See earlier discussion about integrating email and social media.)

Examples of Topics. The following are examples of just some of the kinds of Twitter messages created by various organizations:

- Previews or teasers about breaking news stories (news media)
- Reminders about forthcoming events, performances, movie releases or TV episodes (organizers, producers or sponsors)
- Snippets highlighting new blog postings or upcoming or just-published articles or publications (authors or publication editors)
- Details about the activities of celebrities or other notable people of interest to fans or the public-at-large (public figures and their publicists)

- Live updates about the start of or activities taking place during special events (event organizers)
- Teasers about new product introductions, special offers, contests, promotions (manufacturers, retailers or online merchants)
- Comments on current trends, holidays, or news events (any Twitter user)
- Weather, traffic, crime and missing-persons alerts (public safety agencies)
- News about pending actions, appointments, events or issues (political activists, lawmakers)
- Pleas for financial contributions, the recruitment of volunteers or other support (charitable and other not-for-profit organizations)
- Warnings, news updates about disasters and crises, notifications about the closing/reopening of facilities, and information about product scares or recalls (emergency responders)

Newsjacking. Various organizations can seize upon news events, holidays or other observances to broadcast topical messages are intended to gain visibility or remind the public about a brand or organization and to reinforce the recipient's positive affinity with the sender/message sponsor. A specific response by the recipient is not expected. This practice is sometimes known as *newsjacking* – riding on the coattails of a current to event to get exposure. Oreo brand cookies gained attention – and lots of subsequent media exposure – when it deftly distributed a tweet with a stock photo that reminded people they could still dunk their cookie into a glass of milk during the blackout that occurred during the 2013 Super Bowl. However, such tweets need to be really clever—and not appear to be shallowly exploitive.

Employee Tweets. Many organizations now encourage employees to tweet their own followers by sending personal tweets and by retweeting organization-originated messages. Strategies include offering special incentives, soliciting feedback, thanking customers for their business, and other supportive messages.

Organizations also can monitor Twitter to determine what's being said about them and topics related to their operations. Designated employees can then respond to customers who post insightful comments, questions or complaints. Similarly, organizations can follow tweets involving competitors to gain valuable insights, seize opportunities, and avert similar problems.

Using Twitter Effectively

Pursue a Two-Level Strategy. As a message broadcasting tool, tweeting is important at two levels:

- Twitter has become an important vehicle for organizations to dissemination news and information to the general public by tweeting news media professionals, public officials and other opinion leaders who use the information in their own public communications (including retweets). These groups use Twitter far more extensively than the public-at-large to keep informed and to inform others. Many journalists, for example, follow organizations to obtain alerts about breaking news even before an organization makes a formal announcement. Twitter can be a source for other valuable tidbits. Thus an

increasing percentage of news stories original with Twitter. (See Chapter 8 regarding online publicity.)

- Twitter enables organizations to disseminate information to audiences directly – especially those who are highly involved in the organization, its industry or its activities, or who otherwise have an incentive to become followers of an organization. However, Twitter has seen a slow-down in growth of its user base, which suggests that it can be an effective messaging tool only if message sponsors develop a cadre of loyal followers. Thus signing up followers is a critical promotional need. Importantly, the importance of Twitter to reach a large proportion of an organization's constituent base varies widely by organization.

Tips for Maximizing Twitter's Effectiveness. The following are practical suggestions for getting the most out of Twitter:

Promotion

- Promote the organization's presence on Twitter in all relevant promotional activities, including offline advertising and publicity.
- Embed customized Twitter buttons on websites, blogs and other online venues to enable for people to sign up as followers.
- Include #hashtags and @mentions on Facebook and other sites that now allow or encourage using such tags.
- Encourage users to enable technologies that permit Twitter messages to be sent out automatically whenever users engage in favorite activities, such as watching TV shows or visiting a website or blog.
- Include a widget (downloadable from Twitter) on organization websites to display a live online feed of the organization's Twitter posts.
- Take maximum advantage of the 160-character profile provided for each user. Add an optional Page to share additional information.

Twitter Posts

- Send tweets with sufficient frequency that followers become accustomed to hearing from you, but not so constantly that the content becomes frivolous or annoying. As a general rule, as many as 10 tweets a day on an ordinary day is acceptable, but judge followers' responses. Increased frequency is acceptable (and expected) in the wake of extraordinary events.
- Choose clever and personal usernames for employees who tweet on behalf of an organization. For example, "QuiznosSubber" probably will attract more attention than "QuiznosCorp." Personify employees who tweet on behalf of an organization by featuring their photo--not just a corporate logo or default icon.
- Generate genuine conversation by announcing important news, sharing a story, making thought-provoking observations, or posting potentially controversial questions. Be authentic.
- The first several words of each tweet should be carefully worded to maximize impact and elicit a response. Tell people what they should do: Go to... Email..., Call..., View ..., Tell a friend, etc.

- Explicitly invite followers to RT (retweet) messages to their followers and possibly save the message as a Favorite.
- Consider using Twitter Direct to respond to individual users with questions or problems instead of responding to your entire list of followers.
- Select @usernames (handles) and #hashtags carefully. Avoid terms that can misinterpreted or become the subject of ridicule.
- Avoid haste and review posts carefully before sending. Faux pas include negative observations about others that might be regretted later as well as comments that might be considered politically incorrect, offensive, inappropriate or insensitive and that generate a swarm of negative responses.

Images and Video on Twitter

- Include images, animated GIFs, videos and audio in Twitter posts to increase user attention and engagement (follows, retweets, click-throughs). Be sure that sufficient context is provided in the accompanying text, including #hashtags and @mentions.
- Vine is mobile app that allows sponsors to post very short (six-second) videos in the Twitter stream. Twitter now also enables senders to shoot and upload images and videos directly from its mobile app.

Managing Electronic Messaging Programs

Digital promotion managers have a variety of tools available to them for producing and distributing emails, text messages and microblog messages.

Mailing Lists

One of the most important concerns of emailers is to compile, update and maintain lists of prospective email and text message recipients. Organizations have numerous potential sources of names, email addresses and mobile phone numbers. These include:

- Online queries/requests (the best possible source of quality names)
- Prospecting (sending unsolicited emails to potential recipients where there is a reason to change that person would be interested and respond positively)
- Organizational databases containing the name and contact information of customers, members or donors (who typically want and agree to receive emails from organizations)
- List brokers (companies that compile various public lists and then merge the names and purge the duplicates to net out a list of potential prospects)
- Lurking in chatrooms and other online venues with offers that require people to provide contact information.
- Employing adware or spyware that illegally captures email lists from PC and mobile users (an obviously questionable practice not recommended).

Note: The only way to obtain permission to send messages to Twitter users is to encourage them to follow the organization.

Distribution Management Systems. Senders can create and maintain lists and send email, text or Twitter messages using a variety of software programs:

- Self-maintained lists using their own desktop email clients.
- Special PC-based software for managing email and text messages.
- Specialized PC- and mobile-based apps for managing text messages, Twitter and other social media posts.
- Outside service firms that will coordinate details of mail list maintenance and distribution for emails, and text and/or Twitter messaging.
- Marketing or organization automation systems that already integrate email, text messaging and Twitter capabilities.

Database Interfaces. Critical to effective *large-scale* messaging programs is the integration of these communications activities with organization systems that process orders, track membership/customer data, or maintain accounting records.

Digital promotion managers need to work closely with IT staffs to automate the process of sending and responding to an increasingly level of messaging activity. This often requires the installation of API (*application program interface*) software that links email programs to other systems.

Maximizing the Potential of Mobile Email, Text and Microblogging

Some valuable tips:

- **Requesting Information:** When requesting contact information from customers or prospects, request details about their email, texting and Twitter preferences. Ask if they primarily read email on their PCs or wireless devices. Even better, ask about specific kinds of messages they might wish to receive and the best device to send them. For example, some people might like to receive news alerts via cellphone and monthly newsletters via regular email on their PC. If customers use Twitter, provide a customized button to enable them to follow the sender.

Lists: The Bane of Emailers

Maintaining quality lists is one of the greatest challenges confronting digital (and traditional) marketers today.

Some recipients are resistance to providing emailing addresses due to privacy concerns, or simply because they don't want to receive promotional messages. Meanwhile, many people own multiple emails accounts, and don't read messages on all accounts with the same regularity.

The biggest challenge to list quality, however, is *mail list churn* -- the natural turnover of names over time. Some email lists can encounter turnover rates of 20-25% per year. Some common causes include:

- The interests and lifestyles of recipients change
- People are no longer customers
- Changes in email accounts notification preferences
- Death, relocation of the client

Transparent churning involves turnover readily known to senders through un-subscriptions, bounced mails, or complaints. *Opaque churning* results when people simply disengage or ignore delivered messages.

Regrettably, some organizations needlessly contribute to mail list churn by mis-targeting recipients, mis-timing offers, sending irrelevant emails, over-mailing, or using systems with poor functionality or usability. These are turnoffs to recipients.

- **Permissions.** Always ask permission to send email or text messages. Twitter doesn't generate similar privacy concerns because recipients must ask to become followers.
- **Timing of Messages.** Send messages at the optimal time. The most active time for opening email is between 12 noon and 5 p.m. (local time of recipient). Weekdays are best, with the highest volume of mail sent and opened on Wednesdays and Thursdays. To reduce the early morning inbox clutter, avoid dumping emails in early morning hours – stagger distribution from morning to mid-afternoon. Mailing distribution software programs can pre-schedule distribution and stagger delivery times for mail to arrive at the ideal time based on the recipient's time zone around the globe. Recipients are most ready to open messages in the days soon after signing up to receive offers or mail. About one-quarter of email opens occur within 1 hour after delivery. Another 20% occurs by the end of the fourth hour.
- **Pretesting and Testing.** Create *several* drafts of email, text and Twitter messages. Pick the most effective. Alternative creative treatments might be best for mobile email, text and Twitter messages. For large scale messaging programs, pretesting various message elements can help improve results. A common strategy is an experiment that compares two versions using the same outcome measures (referred to as an A/B split run). Also monitor results to ascertain trends or potential problems.
- **Word Counts.** The software programs used to create bulk text and Twitter messages automatically count characters and spaces as text is inputted in the system and will not accept excess verbiage. The length of emails can be similarly analyzed using the Word

SIDEBAR

Comparison of Same Message in Three Formats

Mobile Email

(Header and footer omitted)



**OBAMA-BIDEN
TRANSITION TEAM**

Dear Kirk,

Barack Obama is now officially the President of the United States. In his inaugural address yesterday, he laid out a challenge for all Americans to unite in common purpose and tackle the challenges our nation faces.

In case you missed it, or would like to see it again, the full video, along with the text of President Obama's remarks, is at WhiteHouse.gov. Watch the video now at WhiteHouse.gov.

Thank you,
Obama-Biden Transition Team

Please note that replies to this email will not be answered.

Text Message

(160 characters and spaces max.)

From: Obama-Biden Transition Team
Inauguration Video Online
Date Time

Go to whitehouse.gov. Read the speech and watch the video. See how Barack Obama charged Americans to unite in common purpose and tackle our nation's challenges.

Twitter

(140 characters and spaces max.)

Obama-BidenTransitionTeam:
If you missed it, check out how Barack Obama challenged Americans at yesterday's inauguration. Read speech and watch video at whitehouse.gov 1/21/09 1:10 p.m.

Count tool in most word processing programs. In Microsoft Word: Highlight the message text then choose Review/Tools/Word Count. The dialog box will list data for “Characters” – both with and without spaces.

- **Check Appearance on Devices.** Always test messages using different web browsers, email clients and mobile devices to see how the messages render (appear) on screen. Check that all response mechanisms work properly. Compare the effectiveness of messages in terms of readability, comprehension, usability and response.
- **Avoid frivolous messaging.** Sending an excessive number of messages annoys recipients. In the case of Twitter, this phenomenon has been referred to as “Twitteriocy.” Excessive or irrelevant messages can prompt prospective audiences to block mobile emails or text messages and to “Unfollow” Twitter posts.
- **Legal Compliance.** Emailers are subject to the same federal and truth-in-advertising laws as other marketers. The federal CAN-SPAM Act of 2004 specifically admonishes emailers to avoid false or misleading headings and deceptive subject lines. Mailings must be identified as advertising (if applicable) and provide the physical location of the sender. Emails must inform recipients about how to opt-out of future emails, and requests must be processed within 30 days. Senders also are responsible to monitor the actions of others (such as vendors) on their behalf. Also be aware that the federal Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998 prohibits the collection of personal data from children under age 13.

Send Recipients to a Landing Page

A **landing page** is a specially designated web page where email recipients, viewers of website ads, and visitors to an organization’s own site are referred to take a desired action (buy or order, obtain a quote, make a contribution, volunteer, order tickets, make a reservation, complete a survey, ask for detailed information, etc.).

Organizations should avoid merely referring queries to a website’s home page because visitors can easily become distracted by other content or forget instructions about what to look for. The web addresses for landing pages are not usually published or indexed on search engines. They are only embedded in links found in emails, ads or web pages.

Effective landing pages provide a continuation of the message contained in the original email, ad or website and offer a direct path to taking the desired action. Landing pages should amplify what a visitor has learned previously – not merely repeat the same information. In most cases, visitors decide to take action within 8 seconds or less. So, effective strategy, writing and design are critical. A good technique is to create the targeted landing page *first* (to envision what the user will experience) and *then* write the promotional message.

Strategy

Most landing pages have a *single purpose* and feature a *single offer*. Certain sites (mostly e-commerce sites) might present multiple options, but within a clearly delineated range of choices.

Common elements on found landing pages include: a) a headline, b) a graphic depicting the offer or incentive being given away, c) a brief description of the offer, and d) a fill-in form that visitors will submit for processing. To fully take advantage of a landing page, organizations need to tie landing pages to automated software that allows for the timely acknowledgement of submissions and the quick processing of transactions.

Tips for Writing/Copy

Landing pages are succinctly written, but provide all the detail needed for a visitor to take action with confidence.

- Be single-minded. Lay out a clear path to action and avoid all unnecessary distractions.
- Use the same keywords found in emails, text messages or tweets in the headline and subheads.
- The first paragraph should be only 1-2 lines long. Vary the length of subsequent paragraphs for readability. Generally, paragraphs should be short and easily scanned.
- Use summary heads or subheads above paragraphs when long copy is used.
- Include short lists (3-5 items) of key proof points where appropriate.
- Use strong, specific wording -- including vivid verbs -- that inspire action.
- Establish trust by including assurances, testimonials, guarantees, disclosures, privacy policies. Or Include logos/links to trustworthy endorsing associations or affiliated firms.
- For products/services: Provide a rationale and demonstrate how the offer delivers *value* (otherwise referred to as the offer's *unique value proposition*). Examples include product- or money back-guarantees, free or discounted shipping, quantity purchases or bulk discounts, same-day or next-day shipping, special offer or sale information, exceptional customer service or satisfaction guarantees, or free trials and no-risk offers.
- Write in second person -- feel free to use "you" and "your."

Tips for Landing Page Design

Write to the screen. The entire layout of landing pages for PCs should fit within a standard 800x640-pixel screen and should require no horizontal scrolling and a minimum of vertical scrolling. Landing pages for mobile devices should be set at 320 pixels wide (the common width of a smartphone held upright in the hand) and should require the least possible vertical scrolling.

- Design elements should be consistent with email, ads or websites previously seen by the user. Graphic consistency helps reinforce messages and build credibility.
- Fit the most important content within an imaginary inverted (golden) triangle where the base runs from the top left corner to the top right corner and the third corner is in the middle of the bottom of page. Place the company name or logo on the top left and the action box or form on the top right.
- White backgrounds and blue underlined links (versus hover-overs) are most effective.

- Highlight the Submit/Order/Action button by using with a bright, contrasting color not used elsewhere on the page. Shadowed or 3-D buttons also increase response rates.
- Photos or images should reinforce the message. Prominently show the products being sold or any give-aways being used as incentives to take action.
- Use links to “daughter windows” in order to provide ancillary information (such as detailed product descriptions, shipping details, testimonials/endorsements, etc.)
- Only show the desired action button. Remove all other distracting navigation.

Tips for Forms

A well-designed, easy-to-complete form is essential.

- Validate the value of completing the form by telling the benefits of doing so.
- Provide assurances regarding personal privacy and the security of information provided. Include a link to the organization’s Privacy Policy.
- Ask visitors to complete the *fewest* number of fields possible to conduct the first online transaction. Do not ask for more information than will actually be used for prospecting or order fulfillment purposes. Use a two-step or three-step process to obtain additional details to build a customer profile.
- Feature pre-determined choices that involve the use of square *checkboxes* (with multiple selections possible) or round *radio buttons* (only one choice permissible).
- Provide separate fields for each key information item being asked for. The minimum information usually requested in an initial contact is: *First Name, Last Name* and *Email Address*.
- Additional information commonly requested in an initial contact include: Organization/Affiliation, Mailing Address (provide 2 lines), City, State/Province, Country of Residence, Postal Code (with or without hyphens for 9-digital zip codes) and Telephone Number (with area/access code, prefix and number in separate fields).
- For transactions where credit cards are used, required information includes: Type of credit card (Visa, MasterCard, etc.), 16-digit account number, expiration month and year, and security code (found on the back of the card).
- Whenever possible, pre-populate forms with information already available in a database. Allow and encourage users to provide updates and save changes.
- Unless confronted with serious problems from automated spammers, do not ask people to type in security codes or “captcha” codes (distorted codes that appear on the screen and presumably can only be read by humans).
- Using a check box can psychologically reinforce the respondent’s commitment to the action being asked for. Example: ☐ *Yes! I want to*
- Include an open-ended comments box to capture other information or solicit questions.

Testing Landing Pages

Landing pages are like other forms of direct response advertising: Test landing pages on a continuing basis to enhance their effectiveness. Rotating versions of landing pages (A/B split-run alternatives) can be used to determine effectiveness in converting business. Virtually every component can be tested for effectiveness: headlines, copy

length, testimonials/endorsements, banners, action buttons, calls to action, post-script messages, and the use of different levels of incentives to induce action (bonuses, giveaways, price discounts, guarantees, and free services/free shipping).

Assessing Digital Messaging

Emailers rely on a variety of metrics that can be derived from system software to measure the success of their efforts. Beyond knowing the number of messages sent, which serves as the basis (denominator) for most calculations, emailers pay particular attention to:

- **“Bounce rate”** – the percentage of emails returned or that could not be delivered.
- **“Open” rate** – the percentage of emails that people actually viewed
- **Emails read** – the percentage of emails people read completely (usually projected based on surveys or imputed from time spent, if available)
- **Click-through rates** – the percentage of users who took any kind of action as result of the email – queries, requests for information or quotes, orders.
- **Conversion rates** – the percent of click-throughs, opened emails or delivered emails that resulted in a desired action -- purchases, ticket sales, reservations, enrollments, etc.
- **Cost per conversion (sale/order/action).** The total expenditure on the effort divided by the number of results obtained. If the revenues received and the marginal contribution of the effort to total revenue can be accurately estimated (which is problematic), another useful metric is *return on investment*.