



Responsible Email Marketing in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

In higher education, responsible email marketing emerges as a critical strategy for engaging students, alums, and potential students meaningfully and ethically. By comprehensively examining best practices and regulatory compliance, we aim to provide educational institutions with actionable insights for cultivating trust and enhancing communication effectiveness in their email marketing campaigns. This paper explores the nuanced landscape of responsible email marketing within higher education, focusing on balancing effective communication and ethical considerations. The paper aims to identify the starting points for creating a responsible email marketing campaign in higher education. Sources such as Marketing Compare, OmniUpdate, IBM Marketing Cloud and CoSchedule were used for secondary research. The results were formulated based on data published in surveys by RNL, Emma, Oberlo, LeadSquared, Full Fabric, Barnes and Noble, and WordStream. The following scientific research methods were used to create individual parts of the paper: Extraction, information collection and processing, comparison, analysis, synthesis and interpretation. By examining current practices, regulatory frameworks, and case studies, we identify strategies institutions can employ to respectfully and effectively engage their audiences. Our analysis highlights the importance of transparency, consent, and personalisation in fostering trust and building long-term relationships with students, alums, and prospective learners.

Keywords: Email Marketing, Campaign, Responsibility, Ethics, Higher Education

JEL Classifications: I230, M310, M380

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the nuanced landscape of responsible email marketing within higher education, focusing on balancing effective communication and ethical considerations. With increasing emphasis on data privacy and consent, stricter regulations and enhanced security measures will be implemented to safeguard sensitive information. Ethical considerations will remain paramount, with institutions prioritising transparency and authenticity in their communications to build and maintain trust with recipients. Additionally, emerging technologies such as augmented reality and interactive content may be integrated into email marketing strategies to provide immersive experiences and drive engagement.

Sending emails is an effective form of internet marketing. At the same time, it requires efforts in terms of marketing and also

overcoming legal and technical obstacles. With the help of email marketing, it is possible to sell and build long-term relationships with customers. Businesses use email marketing with the consent of recipients. If the email offer is beneficial, no one is bothered by the email. By regularly sending emails to customers who have given their consent, the company is kept in awareness. Email marketing is one of the most effective forms of brand building. At the same time, it will result in a repeat purchase for most customers (Havro, 2023).

Email marketing has many advantages, which can be divided into four groups (Paulson, 2015):

- Cost: Sending emails is inexpensive compared to other marketing options.
- Effect: With a well-set plan, sales will increase. Emails are sent to target groups of customers who have had experience

with us in the past. Emails are an active link in building sales that contribute to customer trust and retention.

- Variability: Each email sent out differs from one another, and this is used to adapt the offer when selling goods (services) and then to whom we want to offer it, plus the current discounts, news, or changes in the e-shop.
- Availability: The tools used to send mass emails make the job easier, which is why this form of marketing has reached a high availability that is easy to manage. Before sending out emails, it is necessary to subject the email to criticism due to the effectiveness of the advertising campaign.

On the contrary, among the problems and disadvantages of email marketing, we include that operators move emails to the advertising folder and not to the primary email. Therefore, it is necessary to deal with this problem. Other problems include legislation and various technical complications associated with email marketing (Havro, 2023). However, the most common problem is spam, which is bulk unsolicited mail with commercial content. It spreads mainly through email. In addition to being annoying, spam can also mean a particular risk of misusing personal data (Nadanyiova et al., 2021).

1.1. Types of Emails Used in Email Marketing

Email can be interpreted differently and in different forms, content, structures, and designs. Depending on who the email is sent to, it can be a simple response to a customer's inquiry, through a newsletter to campaigns for selected customers or groups of people who are not customers but want to receive an offer (Corejova and Strenitzerova, 2023).

An email with an offer is typical, especially for e-shops. There are specific guidelines to follow before sending emails. The main principle is personalisation, which consists of addressing the customer by name and sending out offers intended for the given customer, according to his preferences, for example, from his previous purchase. Thanks to information systems, most e-shops already have records of tracked customer purchases. If a company or e-shop offers products via email, they must have them in stock. If the ordered goods are not in stock or if their shipment is delayed, this results in customer dissatisfaction. In the future, the customer can no longer accept the offer and can unsubscribe from receiving offers. The email must not be vulgar or excessively flattering. It must be interestingly written/worded in such a way as to arouse curiosity in the recipient. It is necessary to set a sending frequency for offer emails and never exceed it (Roche, 2019).

An electronic newsletter is one of the most effective sales tools. It is a substitute for classic printed leaflets. Its task is to explain the promotion, discount, and new product to customers as best as possible and to link them directly to the website of the e-shop/business (Kothand, 2019).

Permission email is the privilege of an e-shop/business to send an email to customers with permission to send emails. In permission marketing, the customer knows about sharing and directly expects it. The main principle is that creativity comes from the customer. Consent to send information is obtained from the team that

completed the questionnaire. This questionnaire finds out what information the customer is interested in, preferences and hobbies. Therefore, the customer must devote a certain amount of time and effort to be provided with appropriate services (Gorzelanzyk and Zwierzykowska, 2021).

1.2. Legal Regulation of Email Marketing

Email marketing is regulated by laws and regulations in most countries. These laws include the Advertising Act, the E-Commerce Act, the Consumer Protection Act, the Electronic Communications Act, the Copyright Act and the Personal Data Protection Act.

The Advertising Act usually establishes general requirements for advertising and specific products, the protection of consumers and entrepreneurs against the effects and inadmissible comparative advertising, and the competence of public administration bodies in exercising supervision or supervising compliance with such Act (Law no. 147/2001).

The E-Commerce Act mostly talks about the relations between the provider of information society services and their recipient, which arise during their communication at a distance, during the connection of electronic devices by an electronic communication network (Law no. 22/2004).

The consumer protection act points out the rights of consumers and the obligations of manufacturers, importers and suppliers, the scope of public administration bodies in the field of consumer protection, the status of legal entities founded or established for consumer protection and the labelling of products with prices. This law also applies to the sale of products and commuter services in the territory of the given country (Law no. 250/2007).

The Copyright Act regulates the relationships that arise connection with the creation and use of a copyrighted work or artistic performance, in connection with the production and use that occur in connection with the creation and use of a copyrighted work or artistic performance, in connection with the production and use of a sound recording, audiovisual recording or broadcast and in connection with the creation or production and use of a computer program or database in such a way as to protect the rights and legitimate interests of the author, performing artist, sound recording producer, audiovisual recording producer, radio broadcaster and television broadcaster, computer program author, database author and the database manufacturer. The law also regulates the administration of rights (Law no. 185/2015).

The personal data protection act regulates the protection of natural persons' rights against unauthorised data processing. Furthermore, it governs the rights, obligations and responsibilities in the processing of personal data of natural persons (Law no. 18/2018).

"In addition to ethical standards, companies should also strictly comply with European regulations, such as the EU's GDPR, and generally abide by international law for email marketing. An option for senders to provide evidence of their high standards is certification from the Certified Senders Alliance, where the sender

must demonstrably meet specific criteria over a long-term period” (Janssen-Holldiek, 2022).

1.3. Responsible Email Marketing

The ethical behaviour of email senders is crucial, given that they face serious challenges. Mailbox providers must protect their users from unwanted or malicious emails while at the same time ensuring that wanted emails are received. “Blocking malicious phishing emails and spam is a must. On the other hand, senders who meet ethical standards and who can demonstrate these gain a great reputation.” As a result, the deliverability of commercial emails is enhanced (Janssen-Holldiek, 2022).

Responsible email marketing revolves around ethical and considerate practices that prioritise the needs and preferences of subscribers while achieving marketing objectives. At its core, responsible email marketing begins with obtaining explicit consent from recipients before sending any promotional emails. This permission-based approach ensures that emails are welcomed rather than perceived as intrusive or spam. By obtaining consent through opt-in forms or explicit consent checkboxes, marketers lay the foundation for building trust and cultivating positive relationships with subscribers (Clementson, 2024).

Once permission is obtained, responsible email marketing emphasises clear and concise communication. Emails should transparently state why the recipient is receiving the email, what type of content they can expect in the future, and how they can easily unsubscribe if they no longer wish to receive emails. Clarity in messaging helps subscribers understand the purpose of the communication and demonstrates respect for their time and inbox space. This transparency fosters trust and reduces the likelihood of recipients marking emails as spam (Phaneuf, 2024).

Personalisation is another crucial aspect of responsible email marketing. While personalised content can enhance engagement and relevance, it’s vital to personalise ethically and respectfully. Marketers should leverage subscriber data to tailor content based on preferences or past interactions without crossing privacy boundaries or making recipients uncomfortable. Personalisation efforts should enhance the user experience rather than intrude upon privacy, reinforcing that subscribers’ interests and preferences are valued (Nobile and Cantoni, 2023).

Responsible email marketers carefully consider the frequency and timing of their email campaigns. Bombarding subscribers with excessive emails or sending them at inappropriate times can lead to irritation and increased opt-out rates. Striking the right balance between maintaining regular engagement and avoiding overwhelming subscribers is essential. By respecting subscribers’ time and inbox space, marketers can maintain a positive reputation and ensure that their emails continue to be welcomed by recipients (Holovach, 2023).

Finally, compliance with relevant laws and regulations is non-negotiable in responsible email marketing. Adherence to laws such as the CAN-SPAM Act or GDPR demonstrates a commitment to respecting subscribers’ rights and privacy. This

includes providing precise mechanisms for opting out of future communications, accurately representing the sender’s identity and subject matter, and including a physical mailing address in the email. By complying with these regulations, marketers mitigate legal risks, uphold ethical standards, and preserve trust with subscribers. In summary, responsible email marketing is characterised by permission-based practices, clear communication, ethical personalisation, mindful frequency and timing, and strict compliance with regulations (Bottoms, 2019).

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper aims to identify the starting points for creating a responsible email marketing campaign in higher education. The procedure for building this paper was chosen from characterising email marketing, determining its advantages and disadvantages, and defining types of emails such as emails with offers, newsletters, and permission emails. We continued by describing the legal regulation of -mail marketing and defining responsible email marketing. Based on research conducted by Marketing Compare, OmniUpdate, IBM Marketing Cloud and CoSchedule, it was possible to identify the first starting points for creating a responsible email marketing campaign in higher education. Combining these results with the results of the RNL, Emma, Oberlo, LeadSquared, Full Fabric, Barnes and Noble, and WordStream made it possible to formulate conclusions in a final form.

The following scientific research methods were used in the creation of individual parts of the paper:

- The extraction method was used in the search and subsequent processing of suitable literature from literary works and internet pages;
- The method of information collection and processing was used throughout the paper, where we systematically collected the available information based on it;
- The comparison method was used in the evaluation of individual facts in the results of the paper;
- The analysis method was applied in the summarisation of theoretical starting points and the analysis of email marketing tools and email marketing campaigns in higher education;
- The synthesis method was used to search and find out about the connection and relationship between individual email marketing tools;
- The method of interpretation was applied to evaluate the achievement of the paper’s set goal and formulate conclusions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital strategies have become the standard in higher education. Universities and institutions worldwide report that they are now dedicating most of their marketing resources to online digital marketing. The shift to digital marketing is one of the most consistent trends in the higher education sector. Digital marketing offers a variety of media at your fingertips. Institutional websites are now necessary to connect and serve prospective and active students, and many colleges and universities are engaging with social media to reach students on their own terms.

Email and social media marketing have emerged as one of the significant drivers in sustaining the competitive advantage of any organisation, but there is a lack of systematic empirical evidence regarding the effect of such marketing activities (de la Roche et al., 2022).

A dynamic online presence, a user-friendly interface, and relevant promotions are essential to create a positive and responsive brand statement for higher education. Along with well-developed institutional websites, email marketing is among the most effective higher education marketing strategies. Email has wholly disrupted traditional mail marketing tools in the higher education sector. And while social media is the dominant medium of communication for most, today's students still rely on email to form correspondence with universities and schools.

Email marketing can be a valuable tool for brand identity and student recruitment. Successful higher education email marketing campaigns are based on proven objectives that present a clear and compelling message. Email campaigns can coordinate and optimise with cumbersome but essential tasks such as identifying recipients, building an email list, and facilitating distribution, which takes time and effort. Once a school starts an email campaign, analysing the results and responding to responses becomes another challenge (Keystone, 2024).

3.1. Shortcomings of Email Marketing in Higher Education

The problem with many universities is that while they may have an email marketing plan in place, it may not always be as structured or effective as it could be. Many of the most significant mistakes colleges make are inconsistency and low-quality testing. Other errors include not segmenting emails, unedited emails, sending emails at the wrong time, wrong message subjects, emails containing many words, emails containing images, and emails not being automated (Charette, 2020).

According to a 2019 Marketing Compare survey, only 42% of school marketers personalise their emails. Email personalisation is a simple strategy that can significantly increase email open and click-through rates. One study suggests that emails with personalised subject lines have a 26% higher open rate than emails without. If emails are sent at the wrong time, the email may not be opened. According to studies, the best times are 6:00 AM and 10:00 AM. Afternoon times are at 2:00 PM and 8:00 PM. Subject lines are a common area that receives a lot of attention. The subject should have a maximum of 50 characters. One study found that an email with 16 characters in the subject line had a higher open rate. Emails contain a lot of text, so a balance needs to be found between written and visual content. Some email providers, such as Outlook, Thunderbird and Apple Mail, do not display images automatically and must be loaded manually. Marketing automation is a crucial part of an effective marketing strategy. Marketing automation considers several best practices such as email segmentation and personalisation, while simplifying email marketing efforts (Charette, 2020).

3.2. Trends in Email Marketing in Higher Education

OmniUpdate has published key email findings for 2019 on its website. The first finding is that students will communicate

with institutions via email. 46% of respondents confirmed this statement. The second finding concerns email, which is an essential source of information. This rating was on a scale from 1 to 5, where 5 is the most important. The report received a rating of 3.71. The following finding shows that email is one of the primary ways to access the school's website, and up to 51% of respondents confirmed this. The last finding claims personalisation of email, i.e. that recipients like their name in emails. Up to 66% of respondents confirmed this (Modern Campus, 2021).

A significant study by IBM Marketing Cloud was carried out in 2016 on private, public colleges and universities. IBM Marketing Cloud clients have agreed to have their data published in a marketing study from nearly 750 companies grouping 3,000 brands in 40 countries. In this study, researchers analysed various metrics for all sending countries categorised into seven regions: The US, Canada, England, Australia, New Zealand, parts of Europe and the rest of the world, such as the Americas, Asia Pacific and South Africa. The research shows that only 30.9% of all emails sent are opened by readers, of which 4.3% of readers click on the link included in the email. Subsequently, the total click-through rate to the opening rate is 11.2%. A hard bounce consists of the non-delivery of an email due to an incorrect or non-existent email address, representing an average value of 0.734%. The unsubscribe rate is 0.200%, and individual readers unsubscribe from receiving new emails. Reporting abuse means the mail has been marked as spam, accounting for an average value of 0.023%. In addition, 37% of readers use a webmail client. When comparing mobile phones and computers, it is clear that the overwhelming majority of readers open emails on mobile devices, 41%, and almost half as many on computers, 22%. It concludes that up to 43% of readers have an email open for eight or more seconds, which means the reader is reading it. 34% of readers comprise the group that spends less than two seconds opening an email, and 23% spend more than 23% (The Drum, 2016).

3.3. Creating Responsible Email Marketing in Higher Education

According to studies published by CoSchedule, Tuesday is the best day to send emails. Thursday is the 2nd day if the operators send two emails a week. Wednesday came in second place as the most popular day to send emails. Of course, this depends on the tool used for sending emails. While GetResponse has the highest percentage value on Sunday at 11.8%, MailChimp has it at 17% on Tuesday. Email tools such as Wordstream have an immense percentage value on Friday, and MailerMailer has it on Wednesday and Thursday with a percentage value of 10.7% (CoSchedule, 2024).

The timing of promotional emails can make or break a relationship with subscribers. Sending an email at the wrong time can cause unsubscribing. Many studies have found different results, but the CoSchedule site has summarised them according to available data (Keskin, 2024).

The first best time is at 10:00 AM, although the most common times were in the afternoon, but they concluded that the best time is at 10:00 AM, where the next notable time is at 11:00 AM. The second best time is in the evening from 8:00 PM to 12:00 AM, where the likelihood of a high email open rate is that people check

their email before going to bed. The third best time is at 2:00 PM, where success lies at this time, either when people are leaving work mode or looking for distraction. The last best time is 6:00 AM, where 50% of readers start their day with email in bed. Individual email tools have evaluated the best time for the MailChimp tool between 10:00 AM and 12:00 PM. Other research from MailChimp, which Wordstream analysed, says that the best time is at 2:00 PM. Data from the experiment and quoted by Customer.io say that the best time is from 8:00 PM to midnight. The second peak is between 4:00 PM and 8:00 PM. HubSpot again talks about the best results at 11:00 AM. Data from MailerMailer also indicates that sending emails has the highest percentage of opens at 10:00 AM. Dan Zarella's survey, analysed by GetResponse, suggests that 6:00 PM is the best time for sending emails, followed by late evening from 20:00 to 24:00 (CoSchedule, 2024).

Today's students select email marketing as their primary communication channel, according to RNL's 2021 E-Expectations Trend Report. Students nowadays are similarly overloaded with information; the typical Gen-Zer uses five devices daily. Schools must employ preferred communication channels, such as email marketing, and provide engaging content to connect with potential students. Schools need to define and categorise their target audience before they can begin creating material. A targeted approach that enables more relevant and customised information is a critical strategy for increasing email engagement. According to Emma, an email marketing company, approximately 75% of marketers believe that personalisation increases client engagement. This is particularly true for Gen Z, a generation that highly values highly customised brand experiences. Sending movies with emails can result in a 300% boost in click-through rates (McCrary, 2023).

Video marketing, the preferred information source for Generation Z, has also been shown to have a roughly 70% impact on enrollment decisions. By evoking an emotional response and capturing the essence, video storytelling aids in brand differentiation. Email engagement can also be increased by using images. According to studies, over 70% of consumers read their emails on mobile devices. Marketing emails need to be mobile-optimised to reach potential students efficiently. Schools must ensure the mobile-responsive design is available in their email marketing software. For more extensive campaigns, they may consider various templates tailored for each device (smartphone, laptop, tablet, etc.) (McCrary, 2023).

According to Barnes and Noble, a strong subject line can make or break a campaign, as 42% of students scan emails before opening them. An energising call to action must be included to send an email. Emails must be scheduled carefully to stand out in people's crowded inboxes. A prospect is more likely to open up when the timing is appropriate and convenient for them. Schools need to monitor performance trends and results after each email is sent. Schools must also schedule regular time to assess ways to enhance their approach and strategy (McCrary, 2023).

4. CONCLUSIONS

The paper aimed to identify the starting points for creating a responsible email marketing campaign in higher education. Based

on research conducted by Marketing Compare, OmniUpdate, IBM Marketing Cloud and CoSchedule, it was possible to identify the first starting points for creating a responsible email marketing campaign in higher education. Combining these results with the results of the RNL, Emma, Oberlo, LeadSquared, Full Fabric, Barnes and Noble, and WordStream made it possible to formulate conclusions in a final form.

As a result, ideal responsible email marketing in higher education is ethical. It involves personalised communication tailored to the interests and needs of prospective students, alums, and other stakeholders, fostering a sense of community and engagement. Precise opt-in and opt-out mechanisms should allow individuals to manage their subscription preferences easily. Moreover, adherence to data protection regulations such as GDPR ensures the security of personal information. Timeliness and frequency are crucial; emails with valuable content should be sent at appropriate intervals, avoiding spamming. Lastly, ethical practices dictate honest representation of offerings, avoiding deceptive tactics and ensuring all claims are substantiated, building trust and credibility within the higher education community.

Responsible email marketing in higher education should prioritise transparency, relevance, and respect for recipients' preferences and privacy. Responsible email marketing in higher education should be based on permission, transparency, relevance, and regulation compliance. By prioritising these principles, institutions can effectively engage with their audiences while fostering trust and respect.

In the future, responsible email marketing in higher education will likely evolve towards even greater personalisation and automation, leveraging advanced AI algorithms to tailor content and timing based on individual preferences and behaviours. With increasing emphasis on data privacy and consent, stricter regulations and enhanced security measures will be implemented to safeguard sensitive information. Ethical considerations will remain paramount, with institutions prioritising transparency and authenticity in their communications to build and maintain trust with recipients. Collaboration between marketing teams and academic departments will deepen, ensuring email campaigns align with educational objectives and deliver meaningful value to students, alums, and other stakeholders. Additionally, emerging technologies such as augmented reality and interactive content may be integrated into email marketing strategies to provide immersive experiences and drive engagement.

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