Best Practices for sending Mass Communications

Message Body

Formatting of mass emails should be kept as simple as possible. Plain text is best but that is not always a viable option. In those instances, where you need to use formatting; bold, italics, bullets, charts, etc., you should limit the amount of formatting as much as you can. That will help to ensure that your email is displayed correctly across the various email clients and devices that may be used to view your email.

When sending mass emails that contain formatting, it might help to think of the email you're sending as a mini-web site. This is because just as websites display differently depending on the browser or device that is used to read it; so can your emails appear differently dependent on the email client and device that is used to read them.

Avoid copying from Microsoft Word into your email - When you a copy a document from Microsoft Word into an email, the formatting you created in Word gets translated into HTML. Unfortunately, the HTML code that is created by Microsoft Word is contains excessive HTML code. Copying short snippets of text from Microsoft Word will probably be fine but if you're composing a longer email with complex formatting, you may do better to create that email within your email client. If you do copy information directly from Microsoft Word into emails, please be aware that the information may not display correctly/as you expect, across all email clients and devices, and in some rare cases, might not readable.

Use a common and Accessible font - Helvetica, Arial and Times New Roman are all common fonts. When using specialized fonts in emails, the font is not sent with the email. If the recipient of your email does not have the same font that was used to compose the email, their system will try to do a 'best match' replacement. Depending on the font that the recipient's system chooses, this could dramatically change the format of your email potentially making it very hard, and in rare cases impossible, to read.

Sending Attachments - If a file needs to be included with an email, the file should be placed on web accessible storage, e.g., an upload or download area of a departmental website, the departmental area of myMason, etc. Then a link to the document can be placed in the message body.

Including Images – If possible, images should also be made available via web accessible storage, e.g., an upload or download area of a departmental website. Then they can be embedded in in the email, using a URL, which will cause the image to be loaded into the email from the web accessible storage space. You should also try to refrain from 'overloading' your email with too many images.

Depending on your email client, embedding the image with an URL might not be easy to do. In that case your only option may be to include the image as an attachment. In that

case, you will need to be aware of the image size and how it will format within the various email clients and devices. *Also see Accessibility

Try not to create 'cluttered' emails – Multiple font changes, over use of color, images, and other text formatting can lead to an email that feels 'cluttered' to the eye and is not easily readable. As much as possible, try to keep the font you use within an email consistent. If you have worked on creating the email with multiple people, you may need to reset the font for the entire email to be sure that one font is presented consistently.

Be consistent with when you use bold, italics, or other text format elements within your email. Try not to rely on color alone to relay important aspects of your email. People that are color blind may not be able to distinguish between certain shades of color in your email. For example, telling someone that items in red mean x and items in green mean y may not be distinguishable to a person with red/green color blindness.

Watch email length - People may 'zone out' on your email if it's too long. Try to keep emails to the masses as concise as possible. If you find that you have a lot of information to convey, try to structure your email in such a way that it can be easily scanned for information. You may also need to consider if the information is better presented in a document or a website with a shorter email lead-in, directing them to the longer document or website.

Spell check and grammar check – Most modern email clients have a spell check feature. Often spell check is set to auto-correct so, spell checking should be fairly straight forward to accomplish. For grammar checking, Microsoft Word has a grammar check function as well, there are online free grammar checkers. You can copy your text into either of those services and it will show you any needed corrections that you should make.

Links – Make sure that links you are sending in mass emails are functioning and go to reputable sources. Do not use links that contain IP addresses.

Be aware when sending links that require a person to submit login credentials or sensitive information. If you must send links that require a person login and/or submit sensitive information, make it clear in your email what the person should expect when they click on the link. Also, provide some means of contact for them to be able to validate the email and link.

Shortened URLs – Do not use shortened URLs in emails if you can avoid it. (bit.ly, goog.gl, TinyURL, etc.) Shortened URLs were created for social media and not email. In email, they are often used by Spammers/PHISHers to hide where the URL is directing the person. Because of this, using shortened URLs in email is more likely to cause your email to be marked as SPAM. It also prevents a person from being able to verify the link prior to going to the site.

Use templates – If your mail client supports it, create email templates. You can create a template for an email you send out frequently or just for certain situations. Then when you need to send the email you can just update the template without having to start from scratch. If your email client doesn't allow you to create templates, check to see if it can re-send a previously sent email. That would allow you to use a previously sent email as if it was a template.

Sending

Preview the email before you send – If you have created a basic email with very little formatting, you might be able to skip this step. However, if you have created a complex email you should do a couple of test sends of the email to review how the email will look in various email clients and devices. At a minimum you could try viewing the email in, OWA using a couple of different web browsers, the Outlook client, a mobile device, and one outside email service. This will give you an idea of how your email will appear on various platforms. Slight differences in appearance can sometimes be expected and aren't easily corrected. What you're looking for are major changes in formatting, huge space breaks, text that isn't easily readable, and/or elements (images, tables) that have 'shifted' in the email body throwing off the format. Also, be sure to test all links in your email to make sure that they are formatted correctly.

Get a second set of eyes – If you're sending to many people, and the email is long or complex in formatting, it never hurts to send it to a colleague for a once over. They can also let you know if the email 'looks correct' when they view it.

Try not to bombard your recipients with emails – If you send too many emails over a short timeframe, people may begin to 'tune out' emails from you as back scatter. Try to send mass emails only when necessary. If you find that you need to send out multiple mass emails in short succession, then you may need to review the types of emails you are sending to see if you can combine multiple emails into one concise email or maybe consider creating a 'newsletter'.

Accessibility

Images should not be the sole source of information in an email - Images should not be the sole source of information in an email as that puts your email information in a format that may not be accessible to a person with a disability. For example, a person that is sight impaired and uses a screen reader would not be able to 'read' the information contained in the email if the email text was only contained within an image.

Avoid using 'Click Here' - The usage is not recommended as it doesn't provide any context around what the person is 'clicking on'. In addition, people that use screen readers can often get a list of links in an email so they can choose which links to visit. However, if your email only states "click here", they have no idea where they are going. If you do that multiple times in the same email, all a person using a screen reader will

hear is "click here", "click here", "click here". Instead, try using a descriptive term as the hyperlink for your link. For example:

Instead of:

To take the survey, **click here**.

Try

Please take a moment to take the **Johnsonville Survey** on savory sausage.

Use alternate text (Alt Text) with images - If your mail client allows it, you can add alternate text to images embedded in emails. The alternate text should provide context to what the image presents. This information will be read by screen readers and provide context to the image in the email if the person cannot see the image. If the image is a picture, you can use the alt text to describe the image.

example: Photo of a white swan.

If the image has text that is meaningful to the announcement, you can put that text in as the alt text.

For example, a slogan like: "Click it or Ticket"

Check email accessibility using the Microsoft Outlook client – The most recent versions of the Microsoft Outlook client can check emails for accessibility issues and correct any issues that are found. Instructions on how to use the Microsoft Outlook accessibility check are available at the links below. If you do not use Microsoft Outlook, there are also free online checkers that you can use to check your emails for accessibility.

Mac - https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Make-your-Outlook-email-accessible-71ce71f4-7b15-4b7a-a2e3-cf91721bbacb#ID0EAACAAA=Mac

Windows - https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Make-your-Outlook-email-accessible-71ce71f4-7b15-4b7a-a2e3-cf91721bbacb#ID0EAACAAA=Windows