



Constructing Effective Email in the Non-Profit Sector

Jenna Hawkins

With the support of

Elizabeth Russell
Bryan Duffett
Andy Horsnell
Darlene Scott
Fran Locke

Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador
Suite 201 Virginia Plaza
Newfoundland Drive
St. John's, NL, A1A 3E9
Tel: (709) 753-9860
Fax: (709) 753-6112

www.envision.ca

Sub Node 6: Communications
Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network

August, 2010



Social Economy and Sustainability Research Network
Partenariat sur l'économie sociale et la durabilité

Bridging, Bonding, and Building / Renforcement des liens et des capacités



Acknowledgements

We acknowledge that assistance of lead researchers Penelope Rowe and Ivan Emke. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Curtis Delaney, Steven Granter, Ruth MacDonald, Jodi McCormick, Bethany Pretty, Pam Corrigan, Amanda Aylward, Raelene Goosney, and Jordan Burt of the Community Sector Council Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Community Sector Council sincerely thanks all of the individuals who participated in this study.

Abstract

Understanding and practicing effective emailing strategies contributes to successful communication between organizations in the non-profit sector, their employees and volunteers, and the communities in which they operate. In this study, we surveyed 251 individuals in Newfoundland and Labrador's non-profit sector to learn of preferences and patterns in opening and reading email in order to construct more effective email-based promotion that reflects preferences of the target audience. We found email recipients most importantly look for: a familiar sender, the presence of a descriptive subject line, having been personally addressed by the sender, and a short and concise email message that communicates relevant content. In addition, we conducted a case study on Community Sector Council Newfoundland and Labrador emails in order to acquire feedback from recipients. The uncovered preferences and patterns should inform non-profit organizations of appropriate and effective emailing strategies to further ensure their emails are being opened and read.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
ABSTRACT.....	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION.....	7
LITERATURE REVIEW	9
Strategies for Improving Email Communication.....	9
Writing emails.	9
Sending emails.....	10
Receiving emails.....	12
COMMUNITY SECTOR COUNCIL RESEARCH.....	13
METHOD	14
Approach and Design.....	14
Participants.....	15
Procedure	17
RESULTS	18
Opening Emails: Encouraging Factors	18
Sender.....	19
Subject line.	20
Opening Email: Discouraging Factors.....	21
Reading Email: Encouraging Factors	22
Content.....	25
Temporal and technological factors.	25
Reading Email: Discouraging Factors	27
DISCUSSION	28
CASE STUDY	31
Results.....	31
Recommendations for CSC Email.....	34
CONCLUSION	36
NOTES.....	39
REFERENCES.....	40
APPENDIX A	43
APPENDIX B	51

Executive Summary

The current research was conducted as an evaluation of the uses of various communication tools in the Atlantic Canadian social economy. This report is one of four research projects conducted between 2008 and 2010 in Sub Node Six of the Social Economy and Sustainability Project (SES) based in Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, NS. The SES is comprised of a number of regional community-university partnerships based in Atlantic Canada, who have come together to explore the social economy in our communities and provinces. Our Sub Node, conducted through a research partnership between Sir Wilfred Grenfell College (SWGFC) in Corner Brook, NL, and the Community Sector Council Newfoundland and Labrador (CSC) in St. John's, NL, focused specifically on communication tools and technologies in the social economy. This ranged from the benefits and challenges of online communities, communication differentials between social enterprises and economic development agencies, uses of communications tools in the social economy, and the current project, constructing effective emails. Together, these projects have allowed substantial insight into the current communication situation in the social economy, from a broad perspective, and have allowed us to make important recommendations for change and improvement to enhance communication.

Using telephone interviews and a web survey, this particular project sought to inform the construction of effective email-based promotion in the non-profit sector. Based on findings from our sample of 251 individuals representing diverse non-profit sector organization in Newfoundland and Labrador, and available literature, our study suggests a series of recommendations for effective email communication. In short, email senders should construct effective email communication by ensuring that emails are accessible to the reader by clearly

structuring content in a consistent format, highlighting important information; including a subject line that introduces the content of the email, and including identifiable links and attachments only if necessary, and refrain from overusing visual effects. Email senders should become known to their recipients, segment their email list according to recipient preferences, and personalize their email messages. Finally, senders should adjust emails to be readable on mobile devices. By identifying email recipients' preferences, current results inform the construction of effective email strategies that may enhance communication in the non-profit sector.

Introduction

Email is cost-efficient, simple, and does not require much training for use as a communication tool. These strengths respond to challenges facing the non-profit sector¹: saving on costs, coping with high turnover rates, and maintaining efficiency. Effective email-based promotion in which “the message sent is decoded by the receiver as the sender intended” (Seshadri & Carstenson, 2007, p. 77-78) is essential to non-profit organizations. Accordingly, this research informs email as part of understanding communications in the non-profit sector. Ultimately, these strategies will help the sender construct an email that results in the recipient(s) taking a requested action. Due to the myriad factors that may influence whether or not the request outlined in an email is acted on by the recipient, this report only informs strategies for improving the *controllable* effectiveness of emailing strategies. Controllable features of sending email include, for example, the design and content of the email message, the frequency at which emails are sent, and the time of day the email is sent.

The functionality of email allows wide access to target audiences (e.g., volunteers, clients, and potential donors). In fact, in 2009, email ranked as the most popular online activity for home Internet users² in Canada, as 93% reported that email was one of their online activities (Statistics Canada, 2010). However, a large body of literature suggests that the for-profit sector has generally been more advanced in computer technology than the non-profit sector (e.g., Henley & Guidry, 2004; Pinho & Macedo, 2006; Schneider, 2003). In addition, a 2008 Epsilon study indicated that, despite having a 90.7% email delivery rate, the non-profit and education industry has lower than average email open rate at 16.6%. The open rate, calculated as a percentage of number of emails opened per number of emails delivered, is more than four percentage points below the average. Additionally, the click rate, calculated as a percentage of

the number of link clicks in an email per number of emails delivered, is notably low across all sectors at an average of 1.7%. If appropriately understood and practiced, computer technology, and email especially, can offer organizations in the non-profit sector an affordable and effective means of communication to arrange meetings (Seshadri & Carstenson, 2007), solicit donations (Waters, 2007), recruit and retain volunteers (Dhebar & Stokes, 2008), notify communities of upcoming events or publications (Cameron, 2006), and promote organizational missions.

When promoting events or newsletters, soliciting donations, or putting out a call for volunteers, it is more efficient to send a *mass email* to a large group of individuals or organizations than to send a large number of individual emails. Mass emails, or email blasts, are emails sent out to a large number of recipients. As Weare, Loges and Oztas (2007) described: “[o]ne person can send a single message to all others in a group without loss of fidelity, usually with no extra marginal cost” (p. 224). Mass emails save time and money for organizations in the non-profit sector (Olsen, Keevers, Paul, & Covington, 2001; Seshadri & Carstenson, 2007; Spence 2002), as they do not incur the financial cost that multiple long-distance telephone calls or travel generated by face-to-face meetings.

A sharp rise in email marketing led to a decrease in click-through rates in 2005 (McCormick, 2006). McCormick (2006) suggested that individuals are receiving more emails and have less time for or interest in opening and reading them. As Hargrave (2008) noted, “[c]onsumers are now very web savvy and are turned off by impersonal mass mailouts” (p. 26). With an already high chance of a non-profit sector organization’s email message being quickly discarded, it is increasingly important to be aware of recipients’ preferences in receiving email and to appropriately adjust emailing strategies.

Literature Review

The available literature on email communication in the non-profit sector is dominated by strategies for effective internal email communication between members of an organization (e.g., Seshadri & Carstenson, 2007; Weare, Loges, & Oztas, 2007), and email strategies for soliciting donations (e.g., Dhebar & Stokes, 2008; Waters, 2007). There is, in addition, a canon of grey literature (publications that are not commercially published or indexed by major databases) and websites that recommend certain promotional and marketing email strategies *not* specific to the non-profit sector (e.g., Arnold, 2008; *Best Resources for Web Developers*, 2009; Castelein, n.d.; Egan, 2010). However, it is important to note that advice found in grey literature and on websites may not be adequately informed by research.

Strategies for Improving Email Communication

In order to inform more effective emailing in the non-profit sector, a series of websites (e.g., *Connected Marketer*, *InboxDetox*, *Microsoft*, and *Mind Tools*) and grey literature (e.g., Arnold, 2008; Johnson-Greene, 2008; Lexell, n.d.) recommend various strategies for ensuring that the email one is sending is received, opened, and, most importantly, read. While there is some agreement from these sources on emailing strategies, it is important to note that email recipients are not a homogeneous group and therefore may have varying email preferences and thus using certain emailing strategies will not guarantee success in reaching all parties.

Writing emails. There are many controllable features of email in the writing stage. It is widely suggested that short and concise emails are crucial to ensuring that the receiver actually reads and understands the message. In line with this thinking, it is recommended that the purpose of the email be positioned as the first sentence, and that each email only contain one message, rather than bombarding the receiver with several questions in one email (Egan, 2010).

Other common tips for writing emails include using a template to maintain a consistent and easy-to-read layout, highlighting important information in the email by bolding, italicizing, or underlining, conducting a spell check, and proofreading the message before sending (Arnold, 2008; Seshardi & Carstenson, 2007, Spence, 2002). Additionally, avoiding repetition of the message in the email, unnecessary or ambiguous attachments, “Click Here” or any unexplained links, and a cluttered layout are all key to effectively communicating a message via email (Arnold, 2008; Spence, 2002).

There is some disagreement in the literature with regard to writing emails. For example, Spence (2002) suggests that the sender should use simple text in the email so that it can be easily read. Conversely, Olsen, Keevers, Paul, and Covington (2001), suggest that “rich-media” (p. 367) messages - colourful or graphic-intense emails - are a more compelling style of email communication than traditional text-only messages.

Sending emails. Once the email is effectively written, the next step is sending it to recipients. The controllable features of sending email include the individuals or groups to whom the email is sent, the “From” address, the subject line, and temporal and technological factors, such as the time at which the email is sent, and its readability on mobile technological devices.

Castelein (n.d.) suggests that segmenting the email list helps increase the probability of the recipient opening and reading the emails. That is: group together recipients who you target to receive certain emails but not others. If you would like one group to receive emails about a certain topic, send emails about that topic to *only* that group. The segmented list may aggregate recipients by their interests, location, type of organization, and so on. Senders may do this by setting up online preference centres in which customers (in this case: fellow non-profit sector employees, volunteers, community members, and donors) can select the types of editorial and

promotional offerings they want to receive (Johnson-Greene, 2008). The sender can then segment an emailing list so that recipients receive only what they request (Epsilon, 2008; Johnson-Greene, 2008), rather than be bombarded by messages in which they have no interest. By *not* segmenting an email database and sending emails to every available address, organizations risk their recipients losing interest in or becoming annoyed with the emails they receive and deciding to neither open nor read them. McCormick (2006) expects that click rates in emails will increase as emailing lists become more segmented and relevant messages are sent to a captive audience only, rather than being sent to entire databases.

Sending emails from a familiar “From” address may ensure the sent email is opened (Arnold, 2008; Egan, 2010; McGhee, n.d.; Mind Tools, n.d.), as the receiver may be more likely to open an email from a recognized sender. It is recommended that the sender use a catchy or attractive subject line that is no longer than 35 characters and includes a short description of the main message of the email (Castelein, n.d.).

Finally, Castelein (n.d.) suggests that reaching recipients at the right time and through the appropriate technology is important for ensuring the recipient is reading email communications. While some articles suggest that there are specific days during the week that are more effective for email communication (e.g., *Best Resources for Web Developers*, 2009; Lexell, n.d.), there is no definite agreement on this. Castelein (n.d.) suggests that one can determine the best day(s) to send email by sending them at various times during the day, week, and month, and tracking the response rates, thus getting a feel for which times are best suited to effective emailing. Additionally, it is noted that email readability on a mobile device (e.g., smart phones) is important to reaching a target audience who may be technologically-savvy (Castelein, n.d.).

Receiving emails. Ultimately, the purpose of sending an email is to mobilize the sender to take the requested action, whether that is to schedule a meeting, donate to a charity, or attend a training session. As mentioned, it is difficult to test for the factors that encourage or discourage the recipient from acting on the request of an email. However, there are some more general factors that may impact the successful mobilization effect of an email.

A general factor that may impact the success of the email message is that individuals and organizations are becoming *over-emailed*. As email communication becomes increasingly popular, individuals are not only sending more emails, they are receiving more. With an inbox full of new email messages every day, some emails are likely to be pushed to the side to be opened later, or not at all. Spence (2002) notes a lack of procedure for managing an ever-full email inbox:

The ease of communication has led to uncontrolled increases in exchanges which require action on the part of the recipient. However, there is no clear guidance on how to manage the messages arriving by this new medium and the resulting workload (Spence, 2002, p. 45).

Over-emailing may result in the receiver skimming through emails or deleting them without opening, which may contribute to the overall effectiveness of the email.

Senders need to remember that recipients likely receive numerous emails, most requesting an action. They should consider the frequency at which mass emails are sent, and the particular audience for which the emails are intended (Hargrave, 2008). To prompt the receiver to act on the email request, McGhee (n.d.) recommends that the sender directly inform the recipient of the action they want taken. The email should clearly state its purpose, whether that be a specific request for an action, a response, or just a read-through of the email.

A second general factor that may influence the success of email is that emails in general, and especially mass emails, have a *less personal tone* than other methods of communication.

While there are software options to personalize mass emails (e.g., “Dear John”), the email message, mass or singular, offers less two-way interaction and thus is less personal than face-to-face meetings or even a telephone conversation (Olsen, Keevers, Paul, & Covington, 2001). The distance and asynchronicity of an email message, which serves as a convenient communication line between geographically distant and/or busy individuals, may result in the receiver being less persuaded to take action than they would be by an oral or a face-to-face request (Chesney, 2006; Seshadri & Carstenson, 2007). Moreover, there are no non-verbal cues in email (Seshadri & Carstenson, 2007), and a text-based message may appear cold and distant. This “low social presence” (Cameron, 2006, p. 6) sacrifices a personal connection with the receiver (Garrett & Caldwell, 2002). It may have a negative impact on the receiver’s intent to follow through on the email’s request, or even on their initial willingness to read the email.

Seshadri and Carstenson (2007) note that email communication breakdown is a often a result of senders and/or recipients lacking a clear understanding of how to communicate via email. This understanding is *central* to the question of constructing effective emailing strategies in the non-profit sector, warranting an in-depth examination into the specific inter-workings of email communication.

Community Sector Council Research

The current research sought to inform effective mass emailing strategies for promotional purposes in the non-profit sector, by using the Community Sector Council Newfoundland and Labrador (CSC) mass emails or “email blasts” as the subject of study. Specifically, this research explored factors that influence the receiving, opening, and reading of CSC email by recipients. How descriptive should the subject line be? How important is content, the use of colour and images, or the presence of a link or an attachment? Does the time of day or week, or the device

on which the recipient receives an email affect whether they open and read it? Are there any spam-prone words that should be avoided in an email? In addition, this report focused on CSC emails as a case study, giving CSC email recipients an opportunity to provide the CSC with feedback on its email communication. Based on the recipients' preferences and the available literature, a comprehensive set of recommendations for constructing effective email promotion is provided (see Table 23).

These research questions have been largely ignored in the non-profit sector literature, most likely due to their specificity. Constructing effective email promotion in the non-profit sector will require an understanding of recipient email behavior: the patterns and preferences (if any) regarding receiving, opening, and reading email.

Method

In exploring strategies to increase the promotional effectiveness of email in the non-profit sector, it is necessary to investigate recipient preferences regarding the format, organization, and content of received emails. To do this, we attempted to contact, via both telephone and email, the top 1000 most frequently emailed individuals by the Community Sector Council.

Approach and Design

This research involved both telephone interviews and web surveys. The survey consisted of both open- and closed-ended questions. This combination allowed for respondents to formulate their own responses and to expand on their answers. It provided the researchers with rich qualitative *and* quantitative data. Qualitative data was coded through content analysis, and direct quotations were recorded during telephone surveys. Ethical clearance of this project was granted by the Ethics Board at Sir Wilfred Grenfell College of Memorial University of Newfoundland, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Mount St. Vincent University, Nova Scotia.

Participants

The top one thousand most frequently emailed individuals from the CSC database were contacted and invited to participate in the study. These individuals worked or volunteered in the non-profit sector in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The majority of participants were affiliated with non-profit organizations that were provincially incorporated. Please see Table 1 below for a breakdown of the sample by legal status.

Response	Percentage	Number of Respondents
Provincially-incorporated non-profit organization	73%	162
Federally incorporated non-profit organization	9%	20
Local chapter of a nationally incorporated group	9%	20
Informally organized community group	4%	9
Municipality	3%	6
Hospital Board	2%	5
Co-operative	1%	2
Other	19%	42
Total number of respondents: 224		

*Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could select more than one response.

Urban and rural organizations were almost equally represented in the participant sample, with urban locations representing 56% and rural locations representing 44%, as represented in Table 2.

Response	Percentage	Number of Respondents
Urban	56%	136
Rural	44%	108
Totals	100%	244

Participants were asked to identify their role within their organizations. Executive Directors (39%) and staff (37%) comprised the majority of participants, followed by board members (15%) and volunteers (14%).

Response	Percentage	Number of Responses
Executive Director	39%	94
Staff person	37%	88
Board member	15%	37
Volunteer	14%	34
Total number of respondents: 240		

*Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could select more than one response.

Participants were asked to categorize their organization by sub-sector. Participants ($n = 251$) were representative of the original sample of 1000 that we attempted to survey. Once the first two hundred surveys were completed, it was clear that sports and recreation and faith groups were under-represented in comparison to our original sample. To fill in this gap, the survey was sent to a number of those groups ($n = 462$). Please see Table 4 below for a sub-sector breakdown of the sample.

Response	Percentage	Number of Respondents
Social/Community Services	37%	89
Health	23%	55
Community/Economic Development	21%	50
Education/Training/Employment	20%	47
Sports and Recreation	16%	39
Heritage/Preservation	11%	26
Tourism	9%	22
Faith	9%	22
Arts and Culture	9%	21
Social Justice	8%	20
Environment	8%	19

Human Rights	7%	16
All of the above	0.4%	1
Total number of respondents: 240		

*Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could select more than one response.

The vast majority (96%) of participants *did not* identify as having any limitations that would affect their ability to receive and interpret emails. Of the 4% who expressed that they were limited in their ability to receive and interpret emails, reported difficulties were a lack of skill and understanding of computers/technology.

Procedure

Pilot interviews were initially conducted to test and refine survey questions. The telephone/web survey, which did not differ in content, consisted of more than thirty (30) questions (please see Appendix A for a copy of the survey). Working with the original sample of 1000, researchers attempted to contact individuals by telephone and web survey. A total of 251 participants completed the survey: 139 participants completed the telephone interview and 112 participants completed the web survey. Survey questions examined participant preferences with regard to opening and reading emails. Results were omitted if the participant only completed questions regarding organizational legal status, location, sub-sector, etc. were completed (see Appendix A for Participant Profile questions). There were no variances in the responses provided by participants reached by telephone and those reached by web-based survey.

Method	Responses
Telephone interview	139
Web survey	112
Total	251

Sample: 1000
Response rate: 25.1%

Participant responses were keyed directly into an online survey tool. Themes that were consistent across a number of informants or that stood out as unique or important were noted and expanded upon.

Results

Opening Emails: Encouraging Factors

For some, opening a new email is automatic; for others, deciding whether or not to open a new message requires careful and systematic consideration. When a new email message appears in the recipient’s inbox, a multitude of factors may influence whether or not they open it. Factors may include who the sender is, the subject line, the presence of an attachment or the “Urgent” symbol (!), the time at which the message is received, or how much free time the recipient has. Not all of these factors are controllable by the sender.

“[I’m more likely to open an email] if I know the name of the person or organization sending the e-mail.”

In response to a survey question inquiring about factors that encourage email opening, the most common responses were (1) *familiarity* with the sender, and (2) the *presence* and/or *content* of a subject line. Nine percent of respondents *opened all of their emails*. For this group there are no “encouraging factors,” as such. Please refer to Table 5 below for descriptive statistics of responses to this item.

Table 5: What factors encourage you to open an email?		
Response	Percentage*	Number of Responses
Familiarity with sender	61%	105
Subject line	34%	58
Content	31%	51
No encouraging factors	9%	16
Other (perceived safety, free time, urgent symbol)	17%	29
Total number of respondents: 176		

*Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could provide more than one response.

Interestingly, when asked if the presence of an attachment upon viewing an unopened email would result in the recipient being more or less likely to open the email, the majority of participants (73%) expressed that it would *not* influence their decision. Please see Table 6 below for further information on this item.

Table 6: Are you more or less likely to open an email that you see has an attachment?		
Response	Percentage	Number of Respondents
Does not matter	73%	171
Less likely	19%	44
More likely	8%	19
Totals	100%	234

Sender. Familiarity with the sender was an undeniably important factor for participants in deciding to open an email. This factor is not easily controllable by the sender. However, there are options for the sender to choose *who* the email is sent from. Survey questions in this section sought to uncover whether participants were more likely to open an email sent from an individual person, or from an organization. Interestingly, the majority of respondents (67%) answered that it *does not matter* if the email is from an individual or an organization. Of this group, many noted, again, that familiarity with the sender was more important than if the sender was an individual or an organization. Similarly, some respondents commented that the content of the email is more important than if it is from an individual or an organization. This information is presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Are you more likely to open an email that comes from an individual person or from an organization?		
Response	Percentage	Number of Respondents
Does not matter	67%	163
Individual as sender	24%	57
Organization as sender	9%	22
Totals	100%	242

Subject line. The majority of participants (68%) noted that subject line *does* impact the decision to open an email, as represented in Table 8.

Table 8: Does the subject line impact your decision to open an email?		
Response	Percentage	Number of Respondents
Yes	68%	166
Sometimes	19%	46
No	14%	34
Totals	101%	246

*Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could provide more than one response.

Participants noted that the subject line indicated the email's content, which for them was important in determining whether or not the email was *relevant for or of interest to them*. Some participants noted that the subject line also indicated whether or not the email was *spam, junk, or advertising*, or if it was *urgent or important*. Please refer to Table 9 below for descriptive statistics on these items.

Table 9: How does the subject line impact the decision to open an email?		
Response	Percentage*	Number of Responses
Indicates if email is work-related	37%	40
Presence/design of subject line	29%	32
Indicates spam	28%	30
Indicates urgency of email	14%	15
Other	17%	19
Total number of respondents: 152		

*Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could provide more than one response.

To probe the participants further on what aspects of subject lines are important, we asked them to describe the elements of an effective email. As represented in Table 10, subject lines that were *descriptive* and *preview the email's content*, are *short*, *concise* and *to-the-point*, *easy to read*, and *relevant* to the recipient's work or their organization were noted to be effective and were more likely to result in the recipient opening the email.

Table 10: What factors make an effective subject line?		
Response	Percentage*	Number of Responses
Descriptive	58%	89
Short	28%	44
Concise	27%	41
Related to my work or my interests	18%	27
Clear and easily read	9%	14
Other	18%	28
Total number of respondents: 162		

*Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could provide more than one response.

Opening Email: Discouraging Factors

Just as some factors encouraged individuals to open an email, there are also factors which, if present upon viewing a new and unopened email, discouraged the recipient from opening it. Not surprisingly, and in line with encouraging factors, the three most discouraging factors for the participants were: (1) *unfamiliarity* the sender/source, (2) Perception of the email

as *junk/spam/advertising*, and (3) *Absence* of a subject line or presence of a *poorly-designed* subject line. Please refer to Table 11 for further descriptive details on discouraging factors in opening email.

Other discouraging factors included a perceived lack of relevance, interest, and importance of the email, forwarded emails, and the format of the email. Lastly, 4% of respondents noted that there are no discouraging factors for them.

Table 11: What factors discourage you from opening an email?		
Response	Percentage*	Number of Responses
Unknown/unfamiliar sender	51%	83
Perceived junk email/spam/advertising	39%	65
Lack of relevance/importance/ interest	20%	33
Absence of a or presence of a poorly designed subject line	14%	23
No discouraging factors	4%	7
Other**	26%	42
Total number of respondents: 166		

*Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could provide more than just one answer.

**No trends were found in the "Other" category.

Reading Email: Encouraging Factors

Following from the previous section on *opening* emails, this section investigates the encouraging and discouraging factors at play when making the decision to *read* an email. The factors that most encouraged recipients to read an email were (1) the *design* of the email message, and (2) the *relevance/interest/importance* of the email's content to the recipient personally or to their organization. Please refer to Table 12 for participant responses regarding encouraging factors in reading an email.

Response	Percentage	Number of Responses
Design of email	61%	98
Interesting/relevant/important information	48%	79
Familiar with sender	19%	31
No encouraging factors	4%	6
Other	33%	53
Total number of respondents: 165		

*Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could provide more than one response.

Email design. Many participants expressed their desire for certain email qualities that could be grouped together as *email design*. Emails that are well-written, concise, and grammatically correct were important for the participants. Many participants (61%) noted that they were more receptive to *easy-to-read emails*: the point of the email is obvious, the message is well-written and clear, and content is short and well-organized.

Emails in which the recipient did not have to search for the point and in which the content is clearly organized (bullet points, headings, plain font, etc.) are easier to read. Quantity of free time was also

“I am more likely to read a concise, informative e-mail than a rambling long one.”

important to recipients in deciding whether to read an email. In line with this, emails that arrive at the main point quickly and are easy to both read and understand save time for the recipient.

As represented in Table 13, many participants (72%) were more receptive to *shorter emails*. Shorter emails were noted to be easier to read and interpret, and more efficient for those who were busy. Of the 29% to whom length was unimportant, many commented that email value should not be derived from message length, but from the relevance of the message to the individual or their organization.

Response	Percentage*	Number of Respondents
Short	72%	171
Does not matter	29%	68
Long	0%	0
Totals	101%	239

*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Another controllable feature of the email design is the option to directly and personally address the recipient. We sought to find out whether a personalized greeting, such as “Dear John” or “Hi Jillian!” would result in the recipient being more or less likely to read the email. Participant answers were split almost in half. Fifty-one percent answered that it *does not matter* if the email is personally addressed to them, and 47% answered that they are *more likely* to read the email if it is personally addressed to them. Most who felt that a personalized greeting would not matter noted that the email could still be spam, or that the sender of the email is probably someone they know. Other participants read all incoming emails, personalized or not, or recognized that personalized greetings could be computer-generated. Participants who were *more likely* to read a personally addressed email did so because they perceived it to be more personal, to be from someone they know, or to be important. Please see Table 14 below for statistics representing participant responses to this question.

Response	Percentage	Number of Respondents
Does not matter	51	116
More likely	47	108
Less likely	2	5
Totals	100%	229

The use of visual effects (e.g., different colours, images), is another controllable feature of email. As shown in Table 15, the majority of participants (61%) responded that the use of visual effects *did not matter* to them: it did not result in them being more or less likely to read an email.

Responses	Percentage	Number of Respondents
Does not matter	51	116
More likely	47	108
Less likely	2	5
Totals	100%	229

Content. Sending effective emails involves learning about recipients. A large percentage of participants (48%) commented that if the content of the email was relevant, interesting, or important to them, they would be encouraged to read it. Notably, relevance of content is much more important to recipients when deciding to *read* an email than to open it initially. The relevance, interest, or importance of email content to the recipient is difficult for the sender to control, as it is contingent on the interests and work of each individual recipient.

Temporal and technological factors. In the literature, there is debate over what time(s) during the day and what day(s) during the week are best to send an email.

While it is impossible to control for when a recipient will open and read an email, it can be drawn from this information the best time to *send* an email. As represented in Table 16, participants in this study were most likely to read their emails in the morning (53%), or throughout the day (43%). Therefore, sending an email so that it arrives before the recipient checks email in the morning would be an informed emailing strategy.

“I turn off reading email on the weekends. So anything that comes to me then won't be read until Monday anyway.”

Table 16: What time during the day are you most likely to read your emails?		
Response	Percentage	Number of Responses
Morning	53%	127
I check email throughout the day	43%	104
Evening	8%	19
Night	6%	15
Afternoon	6%	15
Does not matter	4%	10
Total number of respondents: 240		

*Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could provide more than one response.

Since there is disagreement in the literature on which days are best to send emails, we asked participants to share their preferences with us. The large majority of respondents (74%) checked their emails *equally* during each day of the week. However, three quarters of the remaining participants (19% of total sample) noted that they did not read emails on the weekend. No other patterns emerged. Please refer to Table 16 for statistics on this item.

Table 17: Are there days during the week that you are more likely to read the emails you receive?		
Responses	Percentages	Number of Respondents
Yes	26	62
No	74	174
Totals	100%	236

The increasing popularity of cellular telephone technology may impact how emails are received, opened, and read. Therefore, we questioned the participants about their use of smart mobile devices in relation to email. The majority of respondents (72%) *did not receive emails on a mobile device*. Most participants noted a *lack of capacity* (e.g., they did not own a mobile device or they did not understand how to email on their device) or a *disinterest* in receiving emails on a mobile device.

Table 18: Do you receive emails on a smart mobile device?		
Responses	Percentage	Number of Respondents
No	28%	67
Yes	72%	171
Totals	100%	238

It is worth noting that most respondents who *did* receive email on a mobile device actually read email on that device. Please refer to Table 19 below.

Table 19: If you do receive emails on a smart mobile device, do you actually read them on your smart mobile device?		
Responses	Percentages	Number of Respondents
Yes	72%	55
No	28%	21
Totals	100%	76

Reading Email: Discouraging Factors

Factors discouraging participants from reading emails, generally, were the opposite of the encouraging factors. As shown in Table 20, the most discouraging factor noted by respondents was a *poor or undesirable email design*, which included email features such as forwarded emails, repetition of the same message over and over again in an email, a lack of clarity in the content, a mass email sent to many people, a poorly-written message, and the lack of a personalized greeting. Receiving *long emails* (36%), and emails with *uninteresting, irrelevant, or unimportant content* (23%) were also commonly noted discouraging factors. Important to note is that for some respondents (4%), there were no discouraging factors in deciding to read an email – they read them all.

Table 20: What factors discourage you from reading an email?		
Responses	Percentage	Number of Responses
Poor email design	46%	71
Long emails	39%	57
Uninteresting/irrelevant/unimportant information	24%	37
Perceived junk mail/spam/advertising	17%	27
Unknown sender/source	15%	23
No discouraging factors	4%	6
Other	18%	28
Total number of respondents: 159		

*Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could provide more than one response.

Discussion

Current findings suggest that a variety of factors influenced whether or not a recipient opened and read an email. Recipients looked to the sender, the subject line, and the relevance and design of the email. Further, temporal and technological factors also influenced whether or not they opened and read the email.

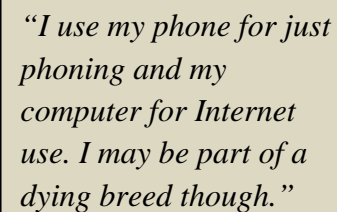
Many participants explained that when deciding whether or not to open an email, they look at who sent it to them. Because email has an inherent “low social presence” (Cameron, 2006, p. 6), recipients prefer to recognize the sender before opening a message. If they are *familiar with the sender*, they are encouraged to open the email. Our study finds that familiarity with sender is most important, and that it *does not matter*, necessarily, if the email is sent from an individual person or from an organization. Arnold (2008) suggests that emails sent from a “From” address with which the recipient is most likely to identify will have a better chance of being opened. In contrast to the personalization of the “From address,” our findings show that an email that is *personally addressed* to the recipient (e.g., Dear John) *did not* impact the decision to *read* an email for just over half of participants (51%), although the other half would be *more likely* to read the email. Many participants considered it a personal touch, perceived it as an

important email, and assumed that it was sent from someone they are familiar with, and therefore would be more likely to read it.

Participants also looked to the subject line. They wanted to see that (1) there is a subject line, (2) the subject line is descriptive enough to indicate what the email will be about, and that it is virus-free, and (3) the subject line is brief and to-the-point. This finding is consistent with the grey literature (e.g., Arnold, 2008; Castelein, n.d.). The subject line is an important feature of an email because it indicates to the recipient whether the email will be relevant or interesting, whether it is spam, junk, or advertising, and whether it is urgent. The presence of any “red flags” in the subject line, such as language outside of the recipients primary language(s), or ambiguous text such as “Hi” or “Check this out!,” excessive punctuation, symbols, or all capital letters (Arnold, 2008), appeared suspicious to many participants and discouraged them from opening the email.

The relevance of the content was more important in deciding to *read* an email than to initially open it. It is recommended in the literature that the sender segment their email list by allowing their recipients to select the type(s) of email they wish to receive (Castelein, n.d.; Epsilon, 2008; Johnson-Greene, 2008). This way, recipients can avoid being bombarded by emails in which they have no interest. We tested for this in our study by asking participants if they would prefer to select the types of emails they receive from the CSC. Although the majority of participants *did not prefer* to select the emails they wish to receive from the CSC (60%), a large percentage *preferred* to have this option (40%). Many participants feared they would miss potentially important or interesting information if they were to select specific email topics. However, if given this option, individuals and organizations could select *all* topics if they so desired, and thus not miss anything.

Interestingly, in deciding to read through an email, participants were even more concerned about the *design* of the email than its relevance. The email design includes the layout of the content, the clarity of the text, the writing style, and so on. An easy-to-read layout, well-organized content, clear and concise writing, and correct grammar all contribute to an effective email design (Seshadri & Carstenson, 2007; Spence, 2002). Despite email being a quick and efficient method for communication, it was important to participants that emails they received were clear and easily accessible. Several participants preferred to be made aware of the email's main idea in the first two lines of the text, and were irritated if they had to search through a long email for the purpose. The vast majority of respondents were more likely to read a short email than a long email. This is not surprising, as many individuals in the voluntary non-profit sector feel time-strained and over-emailed. Email messages that are short and concise allow the reader to quickly scan through without missing any content.



"I use my phone for just phoning and my computer for Internet use. I may be part of a dying breed though."

As mentioned, there is disagreement in the literature pertaining to *visual effects* in emails (e.g., Olsen, Keevers, Paul, & Covington, 2001; Spence 2002). Results indicate that the use of visual effects did *not* have an impact on the decision to read an email. Further consistent with the literature was that participants who were more likely to read emails with visual effects felt that the effects sparked their interest. For those who were *less likely*, it was typically because visual effects were seen as unnecessary and/or annoying, unprofessional and/or distracting, and the cause of downloading and computer problems.

Finally, we found that most of the participants checked and read their emails in the morning or throughout the day. This indicates that the time at which recipients receive emails

will likely impact whether or not they open and read them. For example: if the sender requires the recipient to read a sent email, the sender should send the email so that it will arrive in the recipient's inbox early in the morning. Conversely, most participants *did not* have a particular day or days during the week that they were most likely to read their emails, but of those who *did* (26%), they were most likely to read their emails from Monday to Friday, and not over the weekend. However, if the sender sends an email on Sunday evening, the email will likely be positioned near the top of the recipient's inbox when it is checked early Monday morning. In addition, the majority of participants in this study *did not* receive emails on a smart mobile device (72%), and only 28% did. One can reasonably expect that in the future, the popularity of mobile devices or smartphones will increase. Therefore, appropriately formatting emails to smart mobile device readability will likely have a positive effect on the opening and reading of emails.

Case Study

The primary goal this research project is to inform effective email strategies in the non-profit sector in Newfoundland and Labrador. These strategies are intended to improve communication between the sector's members, potential donors, and organizations. As well, this project has allowed us the opportunity to explore email effectiveness of the Community Sector Council Newfoundland and Labrador (CSC), specifically, as a case study. In addition to the more general questions on email, we asked participants for feedback on CSC emails. As an organization at the centre of the provincial community sector, it is important that the CSC maintain effective communication lines with communities and other organizations.

Results

Familiarity with CSC emails. The vast majority of respondents (95%) were familiar with the CSC, and 97% noted that they have received emails from the CSC in the past. This shows a

very high delivery rate to some of our most emailed individuals, which is evidence that people are acknowledging receipt of our emails. This finding was not surprising, as our participant sample were derived from our most frequently emailed contacts.

Timing of CSC emails. People generally felt that they were emailed more frequently around the time of a specific program/event that the CSC was promoting, typically a *few times a year* (26%) or *monthly* (25%).

Response	Percentage	Number of Responses
A few times a year	27%	58
Monthly	26%	56
Cannot remember	21%	46
A couple of times a month	16%	36
Weekly	10%	22
Once a year	1%	3
Never	0.5%	1
Totals	101.5%	222

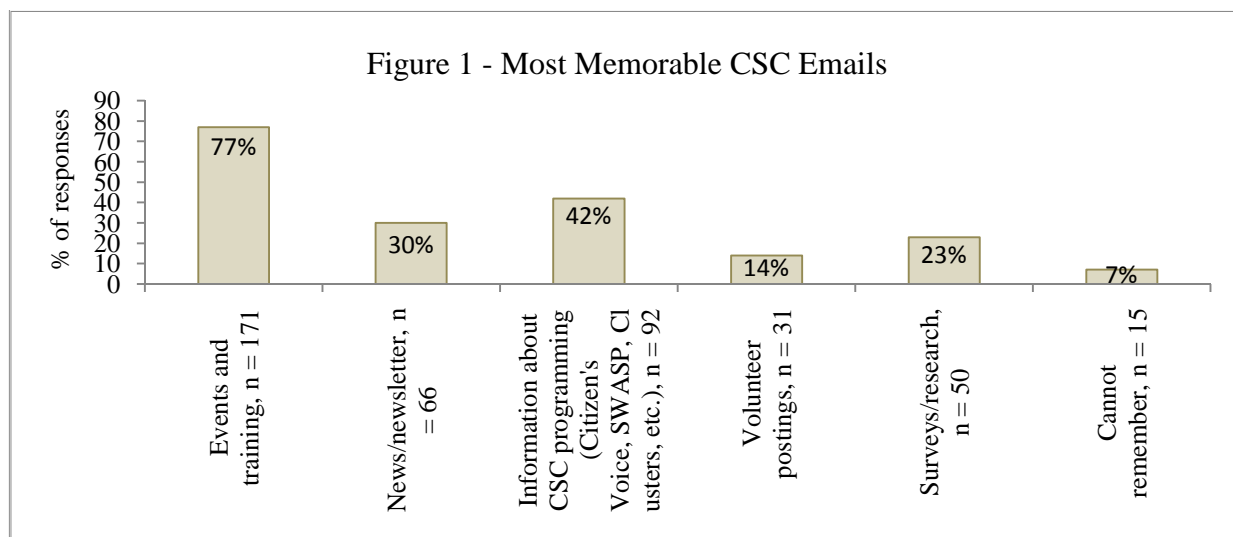
Total number of respondents: 219

*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

The overwhelming majority of participants (97%) were *satisfied* with how often they received emails from the CSC. This is positive, as participants generally noted, and the literature suggests, that being over-emailed by organizations is frustrating, and may contribute to not reading emails.

Response	Percentage	Number of Respondents
Yes	97%	210
No	3%	6
Totals	100%	216

Memorable CSC email content. Most respondents (71%) recalled receiving email about *events and training*. This shows that the CSC emails regarding specific events and training are perhaps more important and/or successful and/or memorable for recipients. Also, a large group (42%) recalled receiving emails about specific CSC programming and projects such as Citizen’s Voice, Student Work and Service Program (SWASP), and Clusters. Please refer to Figure 1 below for a graphical representation of most common topics noted by participants.

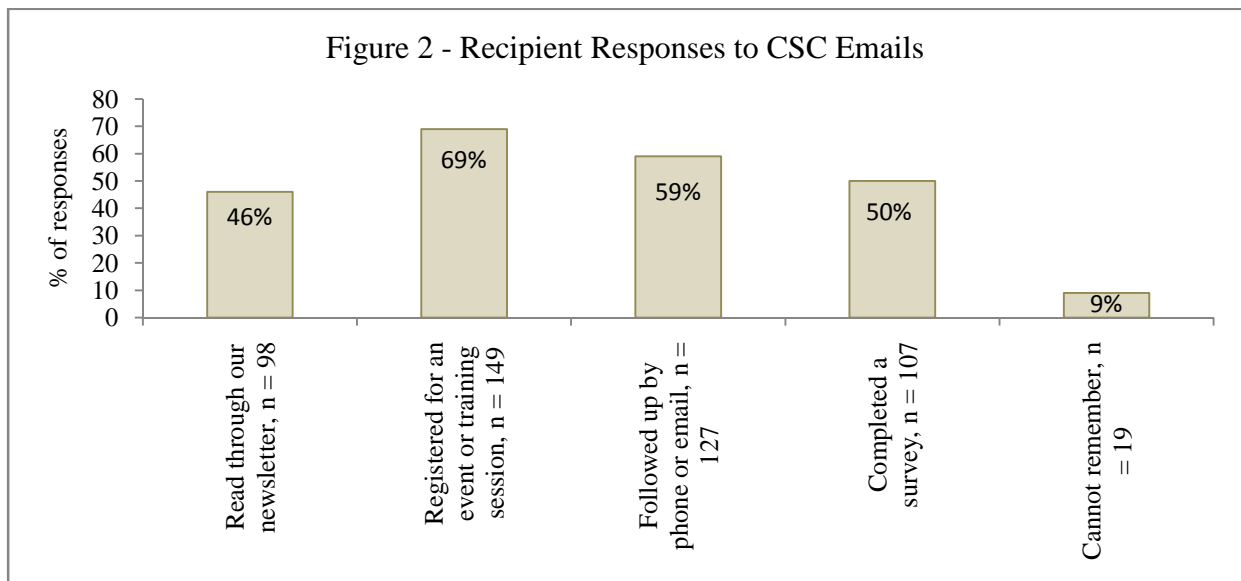


Relevance of CSC emails. The research shows that, for recipients, the relevance of email content was a main contributor to whether an email is read. An overwhelming majority of participants (92%) considered CSC emails to be relevant and/or interesting. Comments in this area were coded according to content, and many respondents noted that they valued emails related to specific *programming*. Additionally, many respondents indicated that even if their organization could not take part in certain programs, training or events offered by the CSC, they appreciated being informed of them and being kept up to date with what the CSC has been doing.

Email list segmentation. The literature suggests that email click rates (Castelein, n.d.; Epsilon, 2008; Johnson-Greene, 2008) can be increased by offering recipients the option to select

the type(s) of emails they receive from the organization (e.g., Castelein, n.d.; Epsilon, 2008; Johnson-Greene, 2008; McCormick, 2006). Allowing recipients to self-select ensures that received email content will be relevant or of interest to them. Results in this area were split, as the majority of respondents (60%) *did not prefer* to select the emails they wish to receive from the CSC, although a large percentage *preferred* to have this option (40%).

Responsiveness to CSC emails. Our study found that CSC email recipients are responsive to CSC emails. Many of our most frequently emailed individuals have responded to CSC emails by registering for an event or training session, reading through the newsletter, following up by phone or email, and/or completing a CSC survey. Please refer to Figure 2 for a graphical representation of recipients' responsiveness to CSC emails.



The following is a summary of the findings and the resulting email recommendations for the CSC. Please refer to Appendix B for a more complete list of participant recommendations.

Recommendations for CSC Email

1. **Keep it up.** Our results have shown that respondents are interested in the content of CSC emails. Email has been a successful tool for communicating with individuals and organizations in the community sector and in generating desired responses (e.g., recipients registering for events).
2. **Allow email recipients to select the type of emails they receive.** The relevance of content was an important determinant of whether recipients would read an email. By asking people what types of offerings they are interested in, the CSC might create specific lists to ensure (1) we are reaching the *right* people, and (2) those people are *reading* the email. In this study, we found that 60% of participants would not prefer the option to self-select, and 40% would prefer this option. Because email recipients can select to receive *all* types of emails, they would not miss out on anything.
3. **Do not over-email.** Unless necessary, mass emails should be sent on no more than a monthly basis. Many participants noted that, generally, they are dissatisfied when they are bombarded with emails. Conversely, recipients were satisfied when they received mass emails from the CSC on a monthly basis.
4. **Reinstate the CSC e-newsletter.** Although not directly asked, many participants expressed desire to receive the CSC e-newsletter again. Furthermore, the e-newsletter was memorable for respondents in communicating various news and events to non-profit sector organizations across the province. The CSC newsletter had been put on hold in early 2010 while revamping the CSC website.
5. **Continue to update the CSC database.** In our research, we found that a large group (20%) of contacts (who are most frequently emailed by the CSC) have incorrect or out-date information entered in the database. Having the most up-to-date information in the database

is essential when sending out mass emails. With such a large database, and in a sector with such high turnover, keeping up-to-date information on all contacts is difficult. The CSC often performs regular checks to ensure the contacts in the database have the correct name, email, telephone, organization affiliation, etc. It is recommended that the CSC continue this activity.

The current research has determined that the CSC has effectively used email as a promotional tool in the community sector. Generally, participants viewed the CSC as a trusted sender of valuable information. The findings and recommendations of this research may assist the CSC in continuing to communicate effectively in the future.

Conclusion

Throughout the analysis of the literature, a qualitative and quantitative investigation of email preferences of recipients, and a case study on CSC emailing, certain patterns emerged. Drawing on these findings, Table 23 provides a short but comprehensive list of tips for email senders in the non-profit sector. This list will summarize current results as well as assist in the construction of effective email promotion.

Table 23: Tips for Constructing Effective Email in the Non-Profit Sector	
Use an accessible format	Use a template for email messages so the format is consistent and easy to read. If there is significant content in the message, use headings or bullet points.
Accentuate important information	Communicate the main purpose of the email in the first two lines, and accentuate the important information (e.g., date, time, location) by bolding, underlining, or italicizing.
Include an effective subject line	Always use a subject line. Make sure the subject line describes what the email will be about and has proper spelling. Avoid spam-prone words, such as “free” or “Hi”, and symbols such as \$

	or *.
Identify any links or attachments present in the email	Avoid ambiguous links (e.g., “Click Here”) or attachments (e.g., “Document”). Put the main message in the email, and use links and attachments for less essential information that will not fit in a short email message.
Do not overuse visual effects	Use visual effects only if they enhance the email. Ensure that they are neat and can quickly and easily be downloaded.
Ensure mobile readability	Become aware of your target audience: are they likely to receive emails on a smart mobile device (e.g., Blackberry® smartphone or iPhone®)? If so, make sure the email is readable on smart mobile devices.
Time it right	Send the email early in the morning, and do not expect that your recipient will check and reply to your email over the weekend.
Become known to your audience	Familiarity with the sender is important for the recipient. Use the appropriate “From” address: use your name if you believe the reader will identify with you, and use your organization’s name if you believe the reader will identify with the organization.
Segment your email list according to preferences chosen by recipients	To ensure the recipient will consider the email content relevant or interesting, allow the people on your email database to select the types of emails they would like to receive from your organization (e.g., upcoming events, newsletter, region-specific information).
Personalize	Personally address your recipient (e.g., “Dear John” or “Hi Jillian”).

This study sought to uncover the preferences of email recipients with regard to the sender-controllable factors of email. The factors that most encouraged recipients to open and read a new email included: a familiar sender, a descriptive subject line, and relevant, well-

organized and grammatically-correct content. As well, participants were most likely to read their emails in the morning or throughout the day, and most did not receive emails on a mobile device. Our findings, coupled with available literature and websites, suggest that organizations in the non-profit sector should segment their email lists by recipient preferences, make their organizations known to the community and individuals, use descriptive subject lines, write accessibly, use links, visual effects, and attachments sparingly, and learn about the tendencies and technologies of their target audiences. Taking these steps will help build more effective email promotion for organizations in the non-profit sector.

Notes

¹ The non-profit sector is also commonly referred to as the voluntary sector, community sector, and social economy.

² *Home Internet users* as defined by Statistics Canada (2010) as “someone who reported using the Internet from home.”

References

- Arnold, J. (2008). *Email marketing for dummies*. Wiley Publishing Inc. NJ: Hoboken.
- Best Resources for Web Developers. (2009). *What is the best day to send email newsletter?*
From <http://www.articlediary.com/article/what-is-the-best-day-to-send-email-newsletter-31.html>
- Cameron, S. (2006). *Using information communication technology tools to facilitate community economic development networks*. Brandon, MB: Manitoba Research Alliance on Community Economic Development in the New Economy.
- Castelein, J. (n.d.). 10 tips for getting people to read your emails. *Connected Marketer*. [Web log message]. From <http://www.genius.com/marketinggeniusblog/3688/10-tips-for-getting-people-to-read-your-emails.html>
- Chesney, T. (2006). The effect of communication medium on research participation decisions. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11, 877-883.
- Dhebar, B. B., & Stokes, B. (2008). A nonprofit manager's guide to online volunteering. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 18, 497-506.
- Egan, M. (2010, February 5). Seven things you can do to make sure people read and understand your email. *InboxDetox*. From <http://inboxdetox.com/seven-things-you-can-do-to-make-sure-people-read-and-understand-your-email>
- Epsilon. (2008). *Email trends and benchmarks*. From http://www.epsilon.com/pdf/EmailTrendandBenchmarkReport_Q1_09%20FINAL.pdf
- Garrett, S., & Caldwell, B. Describing functional requirements for knowledge sharing communities. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 21, 359-364.
- Hargrave, S. (2008). Hitting the marks. *New Media Age*, 26-27.

- Henley, T. K., & Guidry, M. (2004). Online communication in nonprofit organizations. Paper presented at the DDEF sixteenth Annual Robert B. Clarke Direct Interactive Marketing Educators' Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana. Available at <http://www.the-dma.org/dmef/proceedings04/7-Henley.pdf>
- Johnson-Greene, C. (2008). How to deal with email list fatigue. *Circulation Management*, 23, 8.
- Lexell, J. (n.d.). Timing is Everything: Selecting the best time to send your email message. *Business Email Lists*. From <http://www.businessemaillists.com/articles/email-timing.asp>
- McCormick, A. (2006). Email marketing firms suffering from falling click-through rates. *New Media Age*, 13.
- McGhee, S. (n.d.). 7 ways to ensure your e-mail gets read. *Microsoft*. From <http://www.microsoft.com/atwork/getworkdone/emailtips.msp>
- Mind Tools. (n.d.). *Writing effective emails*. From <http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/EmailCommunication.htm>
- Olsen, M., Keevers, M. L., Paul, J., & Covington, S. (2001). E-relationship development strategy for the nonprofit fundraising professional. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 6, 364-373.
- Pinho, J. C., & Macedo, I. M. (2006). The benefits and barriers associated with the use of the internet within the nonprofit sector. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 16, 171-193.
- Schneider, J. (2003). Small, minority-based nonprofits in the information age. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 13, 383-399.
- Seshadri, S., & Carstenson, L. (2007). The perils of e-mail communications in nonprofits. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 18, 77-99.

Spence, L. J. (2002). "Like building a new motorway": Establishing the rules for ethical email use in a UK Higher Education Institution. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 11, 40-51.

Statistics Canada. (2009). Canadian Internet Use Survey, 2009. *The Daily*.

Waters, R. D. (2007). Nonprofit organizations' use of the internet: A content analysis of communication trends on the internet sites of the philanthropy 400. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 18, 59-76.

Weare, C., Loges, W. E., & Oztas, N. (2007). Email effects on the structure of local associations: A social network analysis. *Social Science Quarterly*, 88, 222-243.

Appendix A

Constructing Effective Email in the Community Sector

1. Participant Profile

The Community Sector (formerly Services) Council Newfoundland and Labrador (CSC) is conducting research on the use of email as a promotional medium within the nonprofit sector. From this research, we hope to identify ways to enhance how we communicate our training and events to nonprofit and community leaders like you.

We will share our final report with you, which we hope will provide you with the tools to write effective emails that will be received, opened, read, and understood.

As we are looking to improve both the email strategies of the Community Sector Council and emailing strategies of the nonprofit sector in general, it is important that you answer honestly. We are looking for feedback, whether it be positive or negative.

The survey should take about 5 minutes to complete. We very much appreciate your participation!

Any identifying information will be kept separate from survey data. If you have questions or comments about the survey, please contact Jenna Hawkins at jennahawkins@csc.nf.net or call 1-866-753-9860.

RESEARCH LEADS:

Ivan Emke, Associate Vice-Principal, Research, SWGC
 Penelope M. Rowe, CEO, CSC

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS:

Andy Horsnell, Program Associate, CSC
 Jenna Hawkins, Research Assistant, CSC
 Bryan Duffett, Research Assistant, CSC

1. Out of the following, which legal status best describes your organization?

<input type="radio"/> Provincially incorporated nonprofit organization	<input type="radio"/> Hospital board
<input type="radio"/> Federally incorporated nonprofit organization	<input type="radio"/> Municipality
<input type="radio"/> Informally organized community group	<input type="radio"/> Credit Union
<input type="radio"/> Local chapter of nationally incorporated group	<input type="radio"/> Co-operative

Other (please specify):

Constructing Effective Email in the Community Sector

2. In what sub-sector(s) does your organization concentrate most of its efforts?

<input type="checkbox"/> Arts and Culture	<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Community Services
<input type="checkbox"/> Human Rights	<input type="checkbox"/> Heritage/Preservation
<input type="checkbox"/> Environment	<input type="checkbox"/> Tourism
<input type="checkbox"/> Sports and Recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> Education/Training/Employment
<input type="checkbox"/> Health	<input type="checkbox"/> Community and Economic Development
<input type="checkbox"/> Faith	<input type="checkbox"/> All of the above
<input type="checkbox"/> Social Justice	

Other (please specify):

3. Where is your organization located (please list only one location - that of the organization at which you work)?

<input type="radio"/> Northeast Avalon (St. John's, Mount Pearl and surrounding)	<input type="radio"/> Grand Falls Windsor - Baie Verte - Harbour Breton Region
<input type="radio"/> Avalon	<input type="radio"/> Stephenville - Port aux Basques Region
<input type="radio"/> Clarenville - Bonavista region	<input type="radio"/> Corner Brook - Rocky Harbour Region
<input type="radio"/> Gander - New-Wes/Valley region	<input type="radio"/> St. Anthony - Port aux Choix Region
<input type="radio"/> Burin Peninsula	<input type="radio"/> Labrador Region

Other (please specify):

4. Is your organization located in a rural or an urban area?

Rural

Urban

5. What is your role within the organization?

Executive Director/CEO

Board member

Staff person

Volunteer

Other (please specify):

Constructing Effective Email in the Community Sector

6. Do you have any current limitations that would affect your ability to receive or interpret emails?

Yes

No

If yes, please explain.

2. Opening Emails

These questions are about OPENING emails. Keep in mind that we are talking about email in general.

7. What factors encourage you to open an email?

8. What factors discourage you from opening an email?

9. Are you MORE LIKELY to open an email that comes from an individual or an organization, or does it matter?

An individual as sender

An organization as sender

Does not matter

Can you explain?

10. Does the subject line impact your decision to open an email?

Yes

No

Sometimes

If yes, how?

11. Please describe what you consider an EFFECTIVE SUBJECT LINE to look like.

Constructing Effective Email in the Community Sector

12. Are you MORE OR LESS LIKELY to open an email that you see has an attachment?

- More likely
- Less likely
- Does not matter

Can you explain?

3. Reading Emails

This section is about READING emails. Keep in mind that we are talking about email in general.

13. What factors encourage you to read an email?

14. What factors discourage you from reading an email?

15. Are you MORE LIKELY to read a short or long email, or does it matter?

- Short
- Long
- Does not matter

Can you explain?

16. If the email is personally addressed to you (i.e., Dear John), are you MORE OR LESS LIKELY to read the email?

- More likely
- Less likely
- Does not matter

Can you explain?

Constructing Effective Email in the Community Sector

17. Are you MORE OR LESS LIKELY to read emails that use visual effects (i.e., different colours, pictures)?

- More likely
- Less likely
- Does not matter

Can you explain?

18. Does HOW OFTEN a person/organization sends you emails impact the likelihood of your reading the email?

- Yes
- No

Can you explain?

19. At what time of day are you most likely to read your emails? Please select the single best answer.

- Morning
- Afternoon
- Evening
- Night
- Check email throughout the day
- Does not matter

Can you explain?

20. Are there days during the week that you are more likely to read the emails you receive?

- Yes
- No

If yes, which days?

Constructing Effective Email in the Community Sector

21. Do you receive emails on a smart mobile device?

Yes

No

If no, why not?

22. If you DO receive emails on a smart mobile device, do you actually read them on the smart mobile device?

Yes

No

Comments:

4. Community Sector Council Emails

This final section is about Community Sector Council emails, specifically. Please answer honestly, as we are looking for any and all feedback.

23. Are you familiar with the Community Sector Council Newfoundland and Labrador (CSC)?

Yes

No

24. Do you receive, or have you ever received, email from the CSC?

Yes

No

Constructing Effective Email in the Community Sector

25. How often would you say you receive emails from the CSC - if you can recall?

- Never
- Once a year
- A few times a year
- Monthly
- A couple of times a month
- Weekly
- Cannot remember

Comments:

26. Are you satisfied with how often you receive emails from the CSC?

- Yes
- No

Comments:

27. What are the emails you receive from the CSC usually about?

- Events and training
- News/newsletter
- Information about CSC programming (Citizen's Voice, SWASP, Clusters, etc.)
- Volunteer postings
- Surveys/research
- Cannot remember

Other (please specify):

Constructing Effective Email in the Community Sector

28. Are these emails relevant for or interesting to you?

Yes

No

Can you explain?

29. If you had the option, would you prefer to select the types of emails you receive from the CSC?

Yes

No

Comments:

30. Have you ever responded to a CSC email by:

Reading through a newsletter

Registering for an event or training session

Following up by phone or email

Completing a survey

Cannot remember

Other (please specify):

31. Do you have any recommendations for CSC about its email communication?

32. Do you have any final comments about the use of email as a promotional tool within the nonprofit sector?

Please take this opportunity to review your answers and ensure that all feedback is presented in the way that you intended.

When you are satisfied with your answers please RETURN to this page and click the "Done" button. Doing so will ensure that your responses are collected and analyzed properly.

The Community Sector Council would like to thank you for your participation in this research.

Appendix B

Participant Recommendations and Comments

Survey Question 31: *Do you have any recommendations for the CSC about its email communication?*

- Just keep it concise.
- From time to time seek feedback on the usefulness of the emails to users.
- I would simply suggest moving away from plain text email. In my opinion, they don't look good. I feel a well identified email signature should be included with a visual (perhaps the CSC logo). The blue or black ink makes things run together.
- Give a "blurb" on your organization at the end of your e-mail "signature" (not everyone takes the time to visit websites).
- If community organizations have any events coming up, send emails about other organizations' events! Or include the link from Envision into all the emails we send. E.g., "Click here for upcoming events". More people would go to the events.
- The emails I've seen that have Envision stuff on it are too cluttered visually. There is too much going on.
- I would like to see an explanation of what the CSC actually does or their mission attached to the bottom of their mass emails to give readers a better idea of what they do.
- I would suggest maybe breaking it down by region. More interested in attending stuff in my area.
- Things such as visual effects are no good to me. They slow the computer down. Too many emails from the same organization is frustrating as well. We get so many emails in the run of a year that the less we get about insignificant events the better.
- CSC are good at not bombarding me with emails therefore the ones I get I know are more than likely relevant to me so I will read them.
- Keep up current method of sending emails. I'm not interested in general things such as the newsletter. I just like emails that pertain to my organization.

- From my experience, young people do not read their emails. I coach an under-18 team. They use Facebook. In fact, we had to make a Facebook page to communicate with them. So that's something for you guys to consider.
- The emails seem to be well-organized and easy to read.
- CSC emails are bright enough, clear enough, and not hard to read. Not overly wordy. To the point.
- I like the fact that it's not overbearing and keeps me informed.
- I like email because you get bogged down in stuff during the day. Emails from CSC - if they have things to say - they bring you back to reality. They're like reminders, of funding or professional development. If the CSC emails were at least monthly, you'd feel a relationship with organization.
- Keep the emails short, avoid many colours due to the impact on printing, keep the subject lines to the point, avoid attachments because they create an extra step.
- I used to like getting regular email updates about the Envision site, a service which is no longer performed. I'm aware that you can go online anytime to visit the Envision site, however I enjoyed getting regular updates about the site sent to my email.
- Sometimes e-mails on events or training could be sent a little earlier to plan for, especially when Board members meet once a month.
- Perhaps you could have a person update email addresses so they could be directed to the right person.
- Ask recipients about the type(s) and frequency of messages that they receive and if they wish to continue receiving them.
- Good communication. Not everyone is aware of the CSC or events ongoing. Can you contact organizations and ask them to place posters in the communities for you about upcoming events, particularly in Rural Newfoundland? Try to reach everyone.
- Have had some difficulty opening SurveyMonkey links.
- No, not really [any recommendations]. Maybe they can provide me with some volunteers so I have time to read their emails :).
- Send the information only once.
- Try not to send mass emails to a bunch of people in an organization. Limit it to one key person (the CEO/person in charge).

- Keep it simple. Also, provide links within your emails. I find that helps rather than having to click through 3 or 4 pages of information. That can get time consuming and valuable time gets wasted.
- Continue and keep us informed of training opportunities and funding opportunities.
- Making an option to see only what emails I want to see, breaking down regionally would be more relevant. Know what's happening in the regions.
- Shorter email explanation and brief subject lines.
- The number of times, the quality, and the content of CSC emails/communicates is good. If I see CSC in the subject line, I want to read what it says.
- I can't recall if the CSC sends out regular updates on what it does/is doing, but it might be good to send out general updates, say twice a year to nonprofits (or more often, depending on how often is appropriate), with a general overview of the CSC's work and what help/resources they can offer nonprofits, and with links to the appropriate areas of the CSC website, which has a lot of good basic resources. I refer to the CSC website for direction in different areas (I was there just this morning looking up info on volunteer recruitment), so it's helpful to have a reminder that the website and the organization are out there.
- Newsletters used to be a good method of updating on what is happening; however we now receive so many newsletters from some many organizations that they are usually ignored and deleted.
- Get the weekly newsletter back up and running.
- Emails should be short especially if people are going to be receiving them on devices such as Blackberry® smartphones, etc. People want something they can read and digest quickly and easily. If the email is going to be long, I suggest using a PDF file as an attachment rather than sending a long email.
- I would like to see a social networking site where different users can log on and examine different information or projects that are of interest to them. Also, a forum where people could post things and receive feedback from other non profit groups would be helpful, rather than sending email to a bunch of receivers and not knowing for sure if they read or interpreted the information I sent the in right way. Social networking seems to be one of the best new communication methods and it would be nice if the non profit sector

capitalized on the opportunity. The CSC website would be a nice avenue to approach the social networking tool. Rather than copying Facebook or having a Facebook group, the CSC could add a feature to its website.