

The Nonprofit Email Report

Data-Backed Insights for Better Engagement



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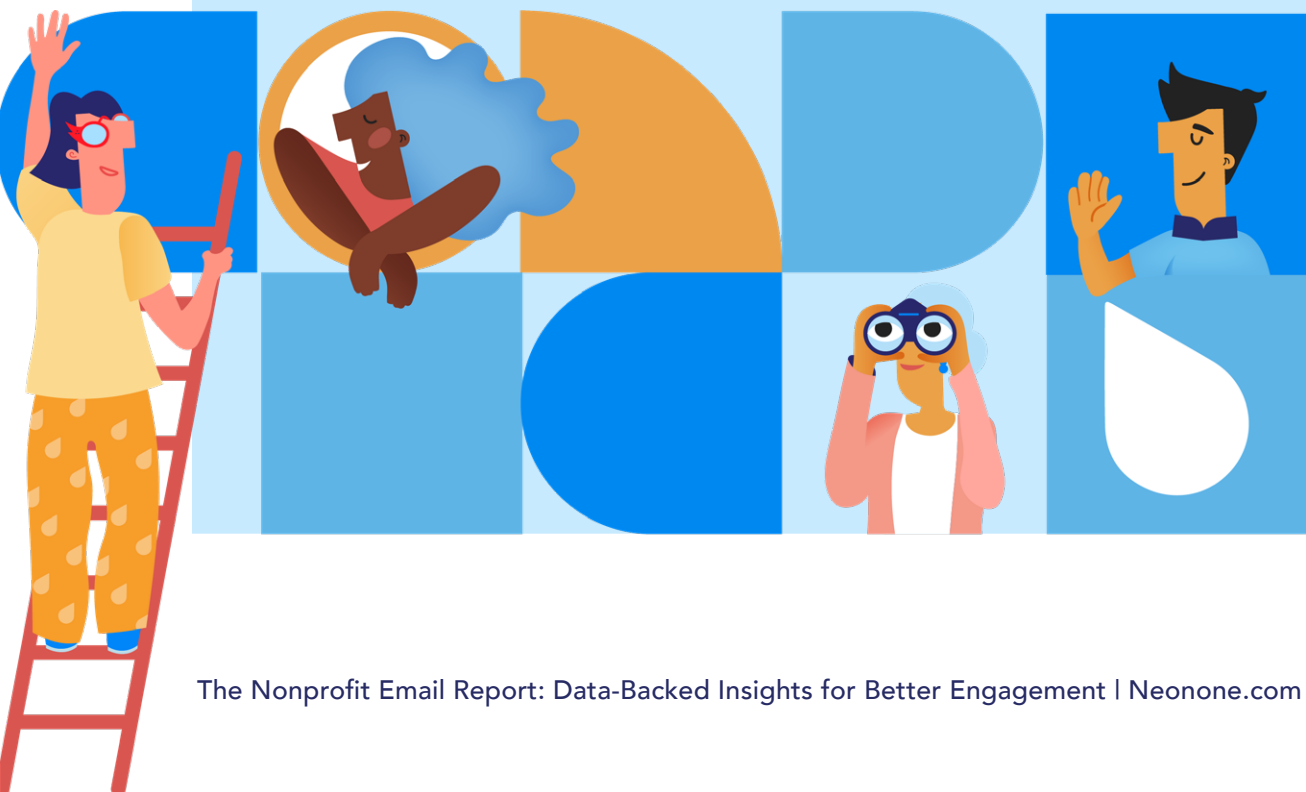
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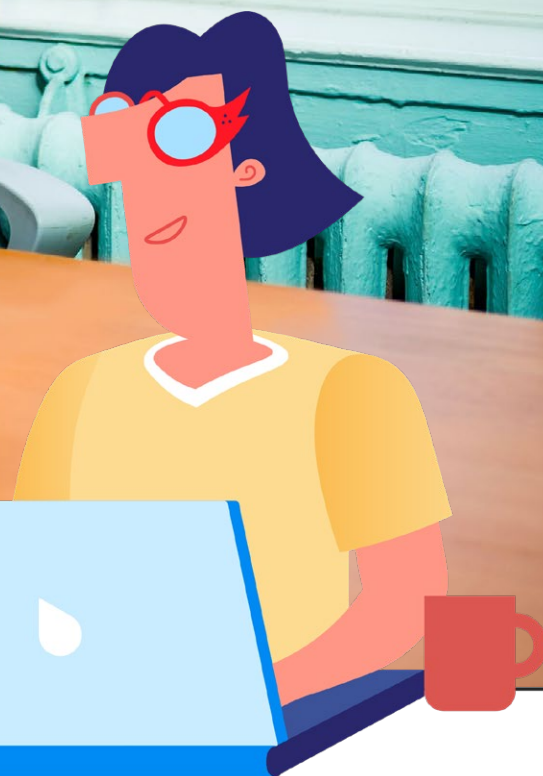
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A Note from Neon One



How do you evaluate your email campaigns?

If you're like many people, you start by comparing your email performance to industry benchmarks. But, if you're a nonprofit organization—especially one that doesn't raise tens of millions every year—you may have a hard time finding benchmarks from organizations like yours. Many of the available email performance benchmarks come from either very large organizations or from for-profit companies. Not any more!

This report summarizes key email performance metrics from 1,495 nonprofit organizations of all sizes and missions. We evaluated 37,472 email campaigns (that's 157,048,634 individual emails) that were sent during 2022, then broke down important benchmarks by list size. This gave us detailed insight into how email works for organizations of different sizes. In this report, you'll discover overall benchmarks that include all 1,495 nonprofits, plus benchmarks broken down by “small nonprofits,” with list sizes between 250 and 999 contacts, and “large nonprofits” with lists that include more than 1,000 contacts.

As you read through this report, you'll find statistics and data points from Neon One's own research, data from other industry sources, and email strategies and takeaways informed by that data. If you ever wonder which statistics come from Neon One and which come from third parties, just look for the citations—anything not accompanied by a formal citation comes from our own data.

Understanding industry benchmarks can give you invaluable insight into how you can improve your own email campaigns' performance. Whether you're a large nonprofit with thousands of email subscribers or a smaller organization with an audience in the hundreds, the statistics and data-informed strategies in this report will help you identify ways to improve your communications and engage your audience.

Happy reading!

The Neon One Team

Who's Represented In This Report?



1,495 Nonprofit Organizations



37,472 Email Campaigns



157,048,634 Individual Emails

515 Organizations

had <1,000
contacts
on their lists.



They sent an
average of

22 emails

980 Organizations

had $\geq 1,000$
contacts
on their lists.



They sent an
average of

27 emails



Why Is Email So Important?

Before you dig into the data, it's important to understand why this is such an important topic. There are thousands of articles, webinars, and other think pieces out there about email for nonprofits. But is it really that important?

According to donors, it is. In fact, data from Neon One's 2022 report, [Donors: Understanding the Future of Individual Giving](#), found that email is a heavy favorite for donors, with 48% citing it as their preferred method of hearing updates and appeals from the organization. Direct mail was the second most preferred channel at 21%, followed by social media (17%), text messaging (8%), and phone calls (2%).

Supporters prefer to receive updates and appeals via email, which makes it the single most important communication channel and the most effective digital fundraising channel. Supporting this is data from the [Global Trends in Giving Report](#), which found that 26% of donors say email is the tool that most inspires them to give, outpacing social media, websites, and print materials.

These trends indicate that understanding key performance benchmarks and using data-backed email strategies is critically important for nonprofits.

Anatomy of an Email

Throughout this report, you'll see references to different parts of an email message. If you need a refresher on email terminology, here's a quick breakdown of the different parts of an email.

1. **"From" email address/display email address:** This is usually something you can customize. Take this email, for example: The message may have been sent from this nonprofit's email platform (think MailChimp, Constant Contact, and Neon CRM), but it looks as though it's coming from Adam at Agloe Nature Center.
2. **Subject line:** Your email's subject line is the first thing a recipient reads once it lands in their inbox.
3. **Preview text:** The preview text is a short snippet of text that helps the reader further understand what they'll find when they open and read your message.
4. **Header image:** The header image is a large picture or graphic that appears at the top of your message. Since this is the first thing someone sees when they open your message, it's a valuable way to capture your reader's attention and make them want to read what you have to say.
5. **Salutation:** This is how you address your email recipient. Many email service providers include the option to use personalization tokens that add a name or title. Having a personalized salutation is a great way to prompt engagement.
6. **Body copy:** This is the main portion of your email.
7. **Signature:** Not all emails require a signature, but they're common additions to some types of emails including personal updates and appeals.
8. **Call to Action:** A call to action (CTA) is any request you make of the person reading your message. The most common ways to include a call to action is by including it in the body of your email, adding a CTA button, or including it in an image.
9. **Postscript:** Many readers will skim over an email to decide if they want to read the whole thing. Your postscript stands out from the rest of your body copy, which makes it especially noticeable when scanning. Use it to reinforce your main message or call to action!
10. **Footer:** Your footer is the block of content at the bottom of your email. This is a great place to put your contact information, links to your social media channels, and unsubscribe buttons.

1

★ Adam at Agloe Natur. Good News! 🌲 You're Saving Our Forests - Your Support helped protect 127

2

3

4



5

Dear Abby,

Last month, you donated to save the Walthoff Ridge Ranch from development. This beautiful piece of land is an important habitat for endangered scrub jays, tortoises, and dozens of endemic species found only in our county. When plans for a new housing development threatened this ecosystem, we asked for your help as we worked with the Walthoff family and local government to preserve 127 acres of land—and you came through.

6

Because of your kindness and passion for preserving Florida's most vulnerable ecosystems, we're happy to report that Walthoff Ridge Ranch is now protected as part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor. Without your generosity, we would have lost this pristine and irreplaceable piece of Florida.

As we celebrate this victory, we also celebrate the community of nature lovers that made this possible. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for advocating for Florida's plants, animals, and ecosystems.

7

Best,
Adam Jarvis
Conservation Coordinator

P.S. To thank you for your generous support of this important campaign, we'd love to invite you to visit Walthoff Ridge Ranch for a guided tour with local botanist Adam Cason. Registration is free—just RSVP at the link below by Thursday, March 30 to claim your spot!

RSVP

8



9

10

Agloe Nature Center
408 Orange Blossom Lane
Lake Bonnie, FL 33800
863.656.1500
natureinfo@agloe.com

01



To:

Nonprofit Email Deliverability & Engagement Benchmarks

Subject:

How does your nonprofit compare to these industry benchmarks? Let's find out!

You know email is an important channel for engaging your audience, educating them about your work, and inspiring them to support your cause. But how successful are your email messages? And how can you make them even better?

Comparing your performance to standard benchmarks can help you gauge your email campaigns' effectiveness and identify ways to improve them. In Part 1 of this report, you'll discover some high-level email performance benchmarks, dig into how they're calculated, and learn what they may mean for your organization.

Here's something to keep in mind as you read through the benchmarks in this study: In June, 2021, Apple unveiled some privacy updates that impact the data nonprofits can gather about their open rates. If you have people in your lists who open emails on devices running iOS 15 or higher, the open rates you track in your email service provider may be slightly different than your actual open rates. Instead of relying heavily on open rates to gauge audience engagement and your emails' effectiveness, consider other metrics like bounce rates, unsubscribe rates, and click-through rates (CTRs).

[Send](#)[Save](#)[Cancel](#)



Nonprofit List Sizes

Different nonprofits have different communities, and what might work for a very large organization might not work for a very small one. Let's take a look at some basic benchmarks around list size, engagement rates, and what this data can mean for you.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The benchmarks in this section will help you evaluate the lists you use to communicate with your supporters. It will also be useful as you evaluate your own list size and whether or not it's a "clean" list. Here, "clean" means that you keep your list free of email addresses that no longer engage with your messaging.

Keeping your list free of inactive contacts is important, but it's not always a top priority when you're a small-but-mighty fundraising team. According to the 2023 [Nonprofit Communications Trends Report](#), 61% of nonprofits will continue to email prospects indefinitely, regardless of engagement—and one-person teams were even more likely to continue emailing unengaged contacts. That can result in a larger list but lower engagement ... and that can be risky!

In a best-case scenario, regularly emailing unengaged contacts can make them perceive your emails as "noise" for them to tune out. In a worst-case scenario, sending those unwanted emails will have a negative impact on your deliverability. Simply put, your email deliverability refers to the ability for your email to land in people's inboxes. If your emails have high bounce rates or regularly go unopened, email servers will be more likely to

send your message to someone's spam folder. In rare instances, you may even email a spam trap, a reactivated email address that's monitored by Internet Service Providers and email blocklists to identify companies that don't practice good email list hygiene. Emailing a spam trap can result in your organization's domain being blocked from sending emails at all.

Let's take a look at list size, open and click-through rates, and unsubscribe rates for nonprofits and see what you can do to improve your own performance.



NONPROFIT LIST SIZE BENCHMARKS

Is your organization's list size on par with other nonprofits like you? Let's take a look.

The average nonprofit's
email list has



4,191 contacts



The average small
nonprofit's email
list has

547 contacts



The average large
nonprofit's email
list has

6,602 contacts

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

You might feel a lot of pressure to build a big email list. That's understandable! But remember, your engagement rates are a more important benchmark than your list size. Having an enormous list of largely unengaged readers is less useful than having a smaller list of readers who regularly interact with your emails.

If you're looking to build your email list, here are some things you can try.

Create Customized Sign-Up Forms

Try adding a simple form to your website inviting people to subscribe to your newsletter. Once they're signed up, they'll gradually learn more about your organization, and you can always include announcements about new fundraising campaigns to give them opportunities to become donors.

Include an Opt-In on Donation and Event Registration Forms

Add a checkbox that donors and event registrants can use to opt into receiving your emails. When you do, see if you can include some language about when and how you'll email them. Adding a simple sentence like "Yes! I'd like to receive occasional information and updates about my gift" can be a powerful way to inspire your supporters to sign up for your emails.

Launch Website Lightboxes or Pop-Ups

A well-designed pop-up can be a great way to capture email addresses. If you decide to try this, make sure to emphasize the benefits of signing up for your emails. What will your reader get out of them? Leading with a value statement about the communications they'll receive will make your pop-up more appealing.

Leverage Resources, Webinars, and Other Content

This won't necessarily work for every nonprofit, but if your nonprofit creates content for your audiences, you might be able to use them to build your email list. If you have any programming that emphasizes education, try "gating" your content by asking for someone to share their email address in return for access to that resource. Worksheets, downloadable activities, eBooks, online classes or seminars, and other educational materials can be a great way to connect with new audiences.

Use In-Person Interest Forms

Next time you're at a community event, host a fundraiser, or open your facility to the public, try using those opportunities to build your email lists. A simple clipboard and lined sheet of paper can be an easy way for interested people to give you their email addresses, or you could set up a laptop or tablet at your event to capture people's information.

If you're looking for ways to grow your email audience, these tactics might help. But however you choose to grow your list, make sure you never buy or rent email lists from other organizations or companies! Doing so will almost certainly result in high spam complaints, bounced emails, unsubscribes, and other negative engagements that can devastate your deliverability.

Remember, having a huge list isn't as important as having an engaged email list ... and that brings us to our next section.



To:

Ask The Expert

Subject:

Is List Segmentation Really That Important?

Email marketing is an afterthought for many nonprofits, and the truth is ... your subscribers are a goldmine! Developing relationships with donors and supporters doesn't have to happen over a phone call or lunch once a year. Sending consistent, captivating emails that connect with subscribers are where the magic happens. If you've ever felt frustrated by social media or watched engagement take a nosedive, email is your best friend!

All email subscribers aren't equal. Don't lump everyone together! Simple, purposeful segmenting is key to effective online fundraising. The best news? You don't have to be a tech-wiz to segment your audiences.

For example, speaking to a specific segment such as volunteers, donors that only give on Giving Tuesday, or attendees of your annual gala gives you the roadmap to tell a compelling story instead of a generic appeal in an attempt to be one-size-fits-all.



Christina Tzavaras Edwards
Founder, Splendid Consulting

Send

Save

Cancel

Nonprofit Email Bounce Rates

Your bounce rate is the percentage of email addresses to which an email cannot be delivered. There are lots of reasons an email may bounce, and they're divided into two categories.

There are soft bounces, which occur when someone's inbox is full or if the email in question is too large. Soft bounces can also occur in the instance that the recipient's email server is down. Then there are hard bounces, which can happen if the email address in question is invalid (like if it contains a typo) or doesn't exist (as would happen if someone gave you a fake email address).

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

When you have a very high bounce rate, it can have a negative impact on your email deliverability. Your emails will be more likely to be marked as spam or even blocked by certain email service providers (ESPs).

Keeping your bounce rates low will help indicate to ESPs that you're a legitimate organization—not a spammer—whose messages deserve to be delivered. But how low is low enough? Let's look at the data to find out.

NONPROFIT EMAIL BOUNCE RATE BENCHMARKS

What's a reasonable email bounce rate? Here are some important benchmarks specific to nonprofits..



1.72%
is the average
nonprofit's bounce rate



The average small
nonprofit's
bounce rate is
1.83%



The average large
nonprofit's
bounce rate
1.73%

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

If your average email bounce rate is at or below these benchmarks, congratulations! If you've got a higher than average bounce rate, it's time to give your email lists a thorough cleaning.

Spend some time reviewing the contacts on your list. Don't worry too much about soft bounces, since those are typically attributed to temporary situations like full email inboxes, overlarge email files, or temporary server outages. If you notice lots of soft bounces on a regular basis, try addressing the problem by ensuring your emails aren't too big. You can start by resizing and compressing images, or you can try linking to content instead of embedding it or sending it as an attachment.

Hard bounces, meanwhile, occur because of permanent or unfixable issues, so you can safely remove those email addresses from your database. Some email platforms and donor management systems, including Neon CRM, will automatically opt out email addresses after a hard bounce. Others may require you to manually pull a list of hard bounces, which you can use to remove invalid addresses from your database.

Nonprofit Email Open Rates

Your open rate is one of the most important metrics to track: It's a great indicator of high-level engagement. Nearly every platform you can use to create and send email campaigns

will include your open rates in any performance reports. It's calculated by dividing the total number of delivered emails (so it doesn't include bounces) by the number of messages that are actually opened.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Your open rates give you a good high-level understanding about how engaged your audiences are with your content. High open rates mean your contacts find your emails interesting and valuable. Low open rates can be a good indicator that something is awry with your email campaigns. If you discover that you have relatively low open rates, you can start investigating other metrics to identify opportunities to improve your performance.



NONPROFIT EMAIL OPEN RATE BENCHMARKS



28.59%

is the average
nonprofit's open rate



The average small
nonprofit's open
rate is

45.70%



The average large
nonprofit's open
rate is

27.64%

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

If your open rates are in line with these benchmarks, your readers perceive your emails as valuable, interesting, or compelling. If your rates are lower than these benchmarks, it's time to start doing some research. Luckily, you can use your open rate alongside other performance markers to get a deeper understanding of what you can do to improve. Start by looking at other benchmarks, like unsubscribes and click-through rates. If you don't notice anything off there, you can try tweaking your subject lines and copy to see if your open rates improve.

Nonprofit Email Unsubscribe Rates

People who are no longer interested in receiving information from you may choose to unsubscribe from your emails. This is usually done by clicking "unsubscribe" and manually confirming their decision.

There are several reasons someone may choose to unsubscribe from your email list. They may no longer find the content interesting, might not feel connected to your cause any more, feel they receive too many emails, or even forgot that they opted into your list in the first place.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Most of the reasons people will unsubscribe are directly related to the way you communicate with your base, which means your unsubscribe rate can give you important insight into how well your messaging resonates with your audiences. High rates may mean you're sending emails too frequently or that your messaging needs work.

If your unsubscribe rates are high, you can safely assume that your audience is not engaged with your messaging. That can have big implications, especially if you rely on email to reach your supporters, raise money, and share important updates. If your rates are low, you can confidently assume that you're doing a good job sending relevant messages to your audiences.

Here are some benchmarks you can use to begin evaluating your own unsubscribe performance.

NONPROFIT EMAIL UNSUBSCRIBE RATE BENCHMARKS

 **0.19%**

Is the average
nonprofit's
unsubscribe rate



The average
small nonprofit's
unsubscribe rate is

0.16%



The average
large nonprofit's
unsubscribe rate is

0.18%

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

If your unsubscribe rate matches these benchmarks, congratulations! You're sending messaging that's relevant to your audience. If you notice your unsubscribe rate is higher than these averages, you might want to adjust your approach. Here are some steps you can take.

Clarify Opt-In Language

It's important that you only email people who have explicitly opted into receiving emails from you. You should only ever email people who have not done so in extremely limited circumstances, like emailing them a donation receipt and thank-you letter. You also don't have to have explicit opt-ins for people you're emailing in these kinds of one-on-one situations.

For anyone else, make sure they know that they're opting into receiving emails from you. Don't just add donors to your email list when they make a gift, for example; instead, include an opt-in field on your donation form. Opt-in forms should be clearly labeled in a way that makes it obvious to someone that they will receive ongoing messaging from your organization.

Tell People What Emails You'll Send Them

Setting expectations early about what your emails will include will help prevent

unsubscribes in the future. Make sure you stick to what you say you're going to do! If your email signup form tells people they're opting into receiving newsletters, don't also send them weekly updates about your weekly peer-to-peer fundraising campaign. If a donor opts into receiving updates about your peer-to-peer campaign, don't send them information about your ongoing capital campaign.

Share How Frequently You'll Email Them

In addition to setting expectations about what you'll email people, it's also helpful to share how frequently you'll email them. People may choose to unsubscribe from you if you contact them more frequently than they were expecting. If someone signs up for monthly newsletters but receives weekly emails, they'll be more likely to unsubscribe from you than they would be if they received messages at the cadence they expected.

Cut Back on Email Frequency

If you're experiencing high unsubscribe rates, you may be emailing your audience too often. This is especially true if you notice that one or two individual lists or segments have higher unsubscribe rates than others. If donors to your capital campaign opted into receiving updates on your progress and have high unsubscribe rates, for example, try sending less frequent emails and see if those rates level off.

Adjust Your Messaging

Another reason many people unsubscribe from emails is because they are no longer interested in the content they receive. If you're emailing people about the topics in

which they've expressed interest and with the frequency they expected but you're still seeing high unsubscribe rates, you may need to adjust the content in your emails. Try changing your messaging to be clearer or more helpful and work toward making your content more engaging.

Ask for Feedback

Still baffled by your unsubscribe rate?

Sometimes, people can give you more insight than data. If you've ruled out other causes, ask for feedback about how you can improve your emails. There are a few ways to get direct feedback about what your audiences want to see in your emails. Try sending your different lists a survey about what kind of information they want to receive from your nonprofit, how frequently they want to hear from you, and how they'd change or improve your emails. Alternatively, you could sit down with a few trusted donors for a heart-to-heart conversation about how you can take your email messaging to the next level.



Nonprofit Email Click-Through Rates

Your click-through rate is the percentage of people who open your email and click one of the links you've included in the body copy. This has always been an important metric to track. But, with the iOS updates that make it harder to track open rates, it's become an even more important way to track your audience's level of engagement with your messaging.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Your click-through rate can give you a ton of insight into your readers. At the surface level, simply understanding your CTR can help you keep an eye on your overall engagement. But, if you dig deeper, you can use this metric to get an understanding of what content your audience finds compelling, what programs interest them, and which appeals are most effective.

Knowing your audience is engaged with your content is helpful. Knowing that links to your impact stories outperform links to your end-of-year financial reports, for example, is even more helpful: You can comfortably say that your readers are more interested in the real-world impact they make with their support than they are in your financials. This data can help you identify areas for improvement, too. If you see high click-through rates to your donation form but low conversions, you've learned that your appeal is effective but that something on your donation form is preventing people from completing a gift.

These benchmarks will help you as you begin to evaluate your own click-through rate.

NONPROFIT EMAIL CLICK-THROUGH RATE BENCHMARKS

 **3.29%**

is the average nonprofit's click-through rate



The average small nonprofit's click-through rate is

10.24%



The average large nonprofit's click-through rate is

2.91%

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Understanding how your own click-through rate stacks up to industry benchmarks is valuable. But it's even more valuable to track how your CTRs change over time.

Our clients' performance data indicates that small nonprofits generally have a much higher CTR than a larger organization. This generally means that the contacts on your lists are more engaged in your work. If you see your CTRs stay level or rise over time, you're doing a good job of sending your constituents information they find valuable. Declining rates may indicate opportunities to tweak how you present information to your readers and ask them to take action.

If you're working with a larger list, your click-through rate will generally be lower than those of smaller lists. By their nature, larger lists tend to include larger numbers of contacts who are unengaged with your messaging. And that's okay! If your CTRs are steady or rising—even if they're lower than small organizations'—you're doing a good job of engaging your audience. If your CTR is low, it may be time to evaluate your list and clean out inactive contacts, especially if open rates and bounce rates are high.

Here are a few steps you can take to diagnose and address CTRs that are lower than you'd like.

- Evaluate the content you're sending the people on your list to ensure it's interesting and inspires further reading or interactions

- Segment your list to send more targeted information that specific groups will find most interesting
- Use linked images or text hyperlinks that help the reader understand what information they'll discover when they click (ex: using a linked image that includes the text "Learn more about our program" instead of using a linked image with no text)
- Make sure links are easy to click on computers, tablets, and phones
- Put important links near the top of your email

Understanding your click-through rate is important if you want to understand what interests your audience. It's also a great metric to track when you're evaluating your appeals' effectiveness, especially when you look at it alongside the fundraising data for each campaign.

Nonprofit Email Fundraising Performance

Bounce rates, unsubscribe rates, and click-through rates are great indicators of your general list engagement. But fundraisers who are using email to send appeals should track two other metrics: The amount raised per email campaign and the average amount raised per email contact.

Since this section focuses on the impact emails have on fundraising, we wanted to filter out non-fundraising email campaigns as much as possible. To do that, we looked at emails sent on the biggest fundraising days of the year—GivingTuesday and the last three days of December. While it's possible that some non-fundraising emails were sent on those days, we can confidently say that the majority of email campaigns in this data set are focused

on fundraising. We also filtered out emails sent to small lists (fewer than 250 people) to help ensure this data set focuses on major campaigns, not smaller or highly-targeted communications.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

When the Global Trends in Giving Report reported that 26% of donors say email is the type of communication that most inspires them to give, it confirmed that this is one of the most critical outlets for tapping into donors' generosity. It's important to look at how your emails help you connect with your donors and move you toward your fundraising goals. Email appeals that result in a high donation volume or a high average donation per contact can be a template for future appeals. And, similarly, emails that don't perform well or inspire smaller gift amounts can give you valuable insight into the types of fundraising appeals that don't resonate with your donor base.



NONPROFIT EMAIL FUNDRAISING: AVERAGE AMOUNT RAISED PER EMAIL



The average nonprofit raised

\$5,598.51

per email campaign



The average small nonprofit raised

\$3,522.54

per email campaign



The average large nonprofit raised

\$6,513.41

per email campaign

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

If your fundraising emails' results don't line up with these benchmarks, there are a few things you might want to try. When sending a fundraising email, make sure you're being specific about what you want readers to do. Make sure you actually ask people to donate: It's easy to assume a reader will understand that you want them to give, but making an explicit request for a donation will help you improve your average amount raised per email. You could take it a step further by asking for a specific dollar amount in your appeal. This can be even more effective if you use your donor database to segment your donors by their average gift amount, then ask for a gift amount that's tailored to each donor's capacity.

At face value, it may look like big organizations with large lists are more successful. Organizations with larger lists raised, on average, 85% more than their smaller counterparts. When you look a little deeper, though, you may realize that this benchmark only tells part of a story. To get the rest, you can look at the average amount raised per person who received your email.

NONPROFIT EMAIL FUNDRAISING: AVERAGE AMOUNT RAISED PER CONTACT



The average nonprofit raised

\$1.11

per email contact



The average small nonprofit raised

\$6.15

per email contact



The average large nonprofit raised

\$0.88

per email contact

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

It's easy to think that larger nonprofits with huge lists are better at engaging their donor base—they usually have more resources, more specialized software, and more donors. But we've found that's not necessarily the case. Larger list sizes may result in more money raised overall, but smaller lists raise more per contact. This can be due to a few reasons. Larger lists may include more unengaged contacts than smaller ones. They may also include a higher number of small dollar donors: A list that includes 200 donors who each give \$10 each will raise more money overall than a list that includes 50 donors who give \$30 each, but the smaller list will have a higher average raised per contact.

If you want to improve your average donation per email contact, here are some things you can do to try to improve:

Segment Your Lists

You probably have accounts in your CRM for people who are not donors. Prioritize sending appeals specifically to groups who are most likely to donate. Based on the community you serve, for example, you might want to send appeals only to donors, volunteers, and other supporters while excluding clients from your appeal. By eliminating groups of people you know can't or won't donate, you can make sure you're only asking for support from the people who can help.

Make More Specific Asks

We touched on this a little already, but it bears repeating: If you want someone to donate after

reading your email, make sure you actually ask them to make a gift. The more specific you can be with your appeal, the better. Segmentation will help. You could segment your donors by gift size, then send appeals to small and mid-level donors that ask for different amounts.

Alternatively, you could create donation forms with suggested gift amounts that are tailored for different donor segments. You then create individual emails for those segments, each of which links to the specific form that matches their giving history.

Evaluate Your Donation Process

If you notice that a high percentage of donors click through to your donation form from your email but don't see many completed transactions, it's time to take a look at your donation process. Your email appeal may be compelling, but an unpleasant donation experience can dissuade people from giving. Donation forms that are too long, include too many options, don't help donors understand their impact, or include inappropriate suggested donation amounts can have a negative impact on your email campaign's effectiveness.



Nonprofit Email Performance by Date & Time

When digging through your email performance data, don't forget that when your audiences receive your emails can be as important as what those emails actually contain. The day of the week and time of day you choose to send those messages can impact the likelihood of your audience engaging with them in the first place.

Since we were interested primarily in performance numbers for all emails—not just fundraising emails—we didn't focus exclusively on the biggest four days of the fundraising year for this analysis. These numbers reflect all emails sent throughout the entirety of 2022.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Your donors receive hundreds of emails throughout their week, and sending your message at the perfect time will help them notice and open it. Your send time can impact nearly every facet of your email's performance: Your open and click-through rates, donation averages, and other engagement metrics can shift based on when your donors receive your message.

How do you know when to send an email? Do you send it early in the mornings, when donors are checking their inboxes over breakfast or when they get to work? Is sending at lunchtime or after work more effective? Do donors read

emails mostly during the week, or is it better to reach them on weekends?

Let's see what the data says.

EMAIL CLICK-THROUGH RATES (CTRS) BY DAY



The best days to send emails if you want to engage donors are

**Wednesdays
and Fridays**



The average CTR for emails sent on Wednesdays was

3.58%



The average CTR for emails sent on **Fridays** was

3.68%

What This Means for You

If you want your supporters to engage with your emails, try sending them on Wednesdays and Fridays. That's when people are most likely to click on links you've included in your message.

If you already send your emails on one or both of these days and have lower click-through rates, there are two things you can do. The first is to experiment with sending on a day that is not a Wednesday or Friday. This data set considers millions of emails sent by nonprofits, but no two nonprofits have the same supporter base. What works for one organization may work differently for you.

The other thing you can do is to evaluate your copy itself. This is especially important if other metrics, like bounce and unsubscribe rates, are in line with industry benchmarks. If you can tell that people are receiving your messages but aren't clicking on them, check your content. Ask yourself:

- Did I include links in my email for people to click on?
- Are any included links visibly different from the text that surrounds them?
- Can readers easily click on or tap on my links from a phone, tablet, or computer?
- Do my links work?
- Are my text hyperlinks and buttons descriptive enough that readers know what they're clicking on?
- Did I do a good job communicating why someone should click on those links?

If sending on different days of the week doesn't improve your click-through rate, you might want to try experimenting with sending at different times of day.

EMAIL OPEN RATES BY TIME OF DAY



The average email send time for nonprofits was

11:44 a.m. CDT

and the average open rate for this time

29.18%

The average email send time for small nonprofits was

12:01 p.m. CDT

with the average open rate for this time

45.37%

The average email send time for large nonprofits was

11:32 a.m. CDT

with the average open rate for this time

26.10%

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

When you send an email can have an immense impact on your performance. Across the board, nonprofits tend to send emails in the late morning and early afternoon. Interestingly, the open rates for small nonprofits exceed those of larger nonprofits by 19.27%. There are lots of reasons this could be the case, one of which is that smaller lists tend to include more engaged contacts. Smaller nonprofits also tend to have higher open rates, lower unsubscribe rates, and higher fundraising amounts per contact than their larger counterparts, which generally points to higher levels of audience engagement for organizations with smaller list sizes.

Remember, these benchmarks will be most helpful to you as a starting place for experimentation. If your open rates are lower than you'd like, try sending your messaging at a different time of day. Your readers might not be as engaged at 12:01 p.m. CT, for example, and may be more likely to engage with you if you send an email at a different time of day.

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
1.62% Bounce rate	2.02% Bounce rate	1.90% Bounce rate
29.60% Open rate	29.31% Open rate	27.73% Open rate
0.18% Unsubscribe rate	0.20% Unsubscribe rate	0.18% Unsubscribe rate
3.42% Click-through rate	3.18% Click-through rate	3.58% Click-through rate

THURSDAY	FRIDAY
1.68% Bounce rate	1.47% Bounce rate
27.30% Open rate	29.04% Open rate
0.17% Unsubscribe rate	0.17% Unsubscribe rate
2.92% Click-through rate	3.68% Click-through rate

SATURDAY	SUNDAY
1.45% Bounce rate	1.29% Bounce rate
27.37% Open rate	31.15% Open rate
0.18% Unsubscribe rate	0.16% Unsubscribe rate
2.65% Click-through rate	3.26% Click-through rate

Email Sender Superlatives

What types of nonprofits have the highest-performing emails? The answers might surprise you!



> Arts, Culture, & Humanities	1.82%
> Educational Institutions	3.24%
> Health & Human Services	2.25%
> Religious Institutions	1.20%
> Community Capacity	1.11%
> Environment & Animal-Related	1.36%
> Hospitals & Care Organizations	1.29%
> Philanthropy	3.22%
> Science, Technology, & Social Sciences	1.68%
> Youth Development	2.42%
> Professional Associations	1.79%
> International	2.75%
<hr/>	
> Arts, Culture, & Humanities	26%
> Educational Institutions	26.69%
> Health & Human Services	28.93%
> Religious Institutions	21.21%
> Community Capacity	26.76%
> Environment & Animal-Related	32.77%
> Hospitals & Care Organizations	37.39%
> Philanthropy	27.76%
> Science, Technology, & Social Sciences	30.37%
> Youth Development	35%
> Recreation, Sports, & Leisure	32.06%
> International	24.57%

Email Sender Superlatives



➤ Arts, Culture, & Humanities	0.19%
➤ Educational Institutions	0.17%
➤ Health & Human Services	0.20%
➤ Religious Institutions	0.17%
➤ Community Capacity	0.14%
➤ Environment & Animal-Related	0.20%
➤ Hospitals & Care Organizations	0.16%
➤ Philanthropy	0.31%
➤ Science, Technology, & Social Sciences	0.14%
➤ Youth Development	0.16%
➤ Recreation, Sports, & Leisure	0.16%
➤ International	0.29%

➤ Arts, Culture, & Humanities	2.66%
➤ Educational Institutions	4.50%
➤ Health & Human Services	4.66%
➤ Religious Institutions	2.50%
➤ Community Capacity	1.88%
➤ Environment & Animal-Related	3.25%
➤ Hospitals & Care Organizations	5.57%
➤ Philanthropy	2.97%
➤ Professional Societies & Associations	7.46%
➤ Youth Development	5.48%
➤ Recreation, Sports, & Leisure	3.98%
➤ International	1.61%

Here's a cool takeaway from these superlatives: Professional associations had both the highest open rate and the lowest unsubscribe rate. Why might that be the case?

Professional associations tend to have audiences who all have common professions or interests. Our jobs are a major part of how we identify ourselves: Communications from these organizations speak directly to their recipients' identities, which means they're especially compelling. Association members may also be paying dues, which may make them more invested in those emails.

If you want to improve your engagement rates, try to connect with your contacts' identities. Your donors may not have paid dues to your organization, but they've still invested in your cause. They support your cause for personal reasons instead of professional ones. If you can tap into those motivations and appeal to their identities as generous individuals, passionate advocates, or cause champions, you'll keep them more engaged.



02



To:

A Data-Driven Approach to Subject Lines & Preview Text

Subject:

Cutting-edge AI tools uncovered fascinating insight into how certain words impact email performance

Variables like the day and time you send your emails can impact your email performance. But even the most perfectly timed emails won't inspire engagement if your audiences don't find them compelling when they land in their inboxes.

This section will take a look at data-backed strategies you can use to create emails that catch readers' attention and motivate them to open your messages. You'll learn how to create compelling subject lines and preview text that will boost your open rates.

[Send](#)[Save](#)[Cancel](#)

Convey Positive Emotions in Subject Lines

Your email’s subject line may only contain a handful of characters, but it can have a huge impact on your email’s performance. Think of your email’s subject line as the headline for your email. It’s typically the first element of your email people will notice, so it’s an important place to set expectations about the type of content your email contains and why readers should open it.

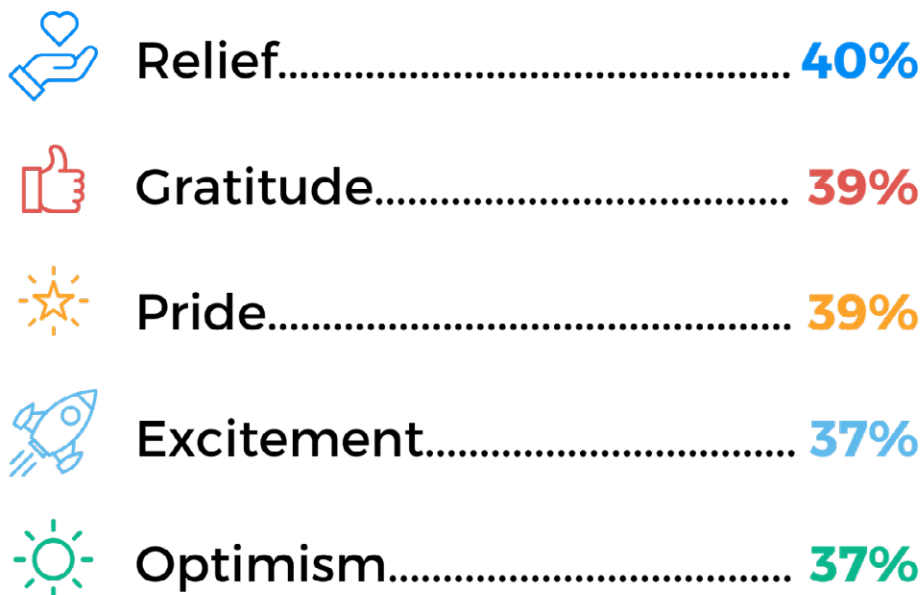
WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

A good email subject line will stand out from the hundreds of other messages in a reader’s inbox, catch their attention, and help them decide to open your email. It’s a critically important part of your email! According to research by Invesp, a top conversion rate optimization firm, 47% of people will open an email based solely on the subject line, and a whopping 69% of them will report an email as spam based on the subject line alone! Your subject line can be the difference between someone opening and interacting with your message and sending it to their spam folders.

Do the emotions you convey in a subject line impact your open rates? The data says it does. We worked with Cherian Koshy of Nonprofit Operating System to do a sentiment analysis of nonprofit email subject lines using an AI system. In the past, sentiment was assigned as positive, negative, or neutral. New technology enabled a richer and more granular understanding of the subject lines. The system identified 27 different emotions in the email campaigns data set, then identified which emotions prompted the highest percentage of email open rates. Let’s take a look.

TOP-PERFORMING SUBJECT LINE EMOTIONS

Here’s what emotions prompted the best open rates:



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Notice that each of the top five emotions are all generally positive. None of the negative emotions (Annoyance, Disapproval, Disappointment, Anger, Sadness, Confusion, Disgust, Fear, Remorse, Embarrassment, Nervousness, Pride, and Grief) inspired high open rates. If you want to improve your open rates, try to create subject lines that inspire positive emotions in your readers.

What does this look like, exactly? Cherian Koshy of Nonprofit Operating System provided these notes and examples of each of the top five most effective emotions in subject lines:

- **Relief** typically expresses completed work or safety such as “Community Recovery After Hurricane Ian” or “Coping with {cause issue}.”
- **Gratitude** is pretty straightforward: Thanking people for their support inspired high open rates.
- **Pride** is often used with self-referential organizational language. Examples of Pride include: “Your Support for [org]” or “End of Year Update for Members.”
- **Excitement** typically involved the use of an exclamation point such as “You’re Invited,” “You’re Great!” or even “Pizza Party!”
- **Optimism** included subject lines such as “What’s Old is New” and “Working Together for our Future.”

As you read over those examples, what emotions did they inspire in you? When you write your own subject lines, try to use language that evokes similar feelings in your readers. According to Koshy, “The results of this analysis suggest that nonprofit organizations should consider using more emotionally charged language in their subject lines, depending on their goals and the message they want to convey particularly at the end of the year.” People support your work because they’re passionate about your cause—tap into that passion by intentionally creating subject lines that elicit an emotional response.

To:

Ask The Expert

Subject:

How Did You Use AI for Subject Line Sentiment Analysis?

Previously, the process of understanding the emotions behind the text was time consuming and relied on human empathy. But with the advent of large language models, nonprofits can now quickly and cost-effectively classify emotions in the text through automation.

“For the purposes of this report, we classified each subject line using OpenAI’s Davinci-003 model as one of the following 27 emotions: Admiration, Approval, Annoyance, Gratitude, Disapproval, Amusement, Curiosity, Love, Optimism, Disappointment, Joy, Realization, Anger, Sadness, Confusion, Caring, Excitement, Surprise, Disgust, Desire, Fear, Remorse, Embarrassment, Nervousness, Pride, Relief, Grief, or Neutral (not counted as an emotion).

“GPT-J provides a better opportunity for emotional analysis, and an updated finding will be shared when these tools can more easily and quickly ingest the volume of data provided. Davinci-003 did create some noise in the classification that slightly impacted the findings. However, this was a very small percentage of the overall output.



Cherian Koshy

Founder, Nonprofit Operating System

Send

Save

Cancel

Words to Include (or Avoid) in Your Subject Lines

When Koshy analyzed Neon One clients' email subject lines, we noticed that some words had exceptionally noteworthy impacts on overall email performance. Getting your constituents to open your emails is the first step toward moving them to action; let's take a look at some specific words or phrases that will impact your open rates.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Subject line analyzers have been available to email creators for years. But few of those tools can give you a close look at the words and phrases nonprofits commonly use for their emails. When you're vying for your audience's attention, knowing what words or phrases will help (or harm) the likelihood of them opening your message is invaluable.

To learn more about how subject line language impacts open rates, Koshy trained a custom machine-learning model to analyze which subject line words impacted email performance. The model identified key words and phrases that impacted open rates, then calculated whether each word would make someone more or less likely to open emails containing that word in the subject line. Take the word "Support," for example: People are 307% more likely to open emails with that word in the subject line.

SUBJECT LINE WORD USAGE DATA

WORD	IMPACT ON OPEN RATES
Support	+ 307% impact
Survey	+ 200% impact
Donate	+ 194% impact
Tuesday	+ 176% impact
Reminder	- 308% impact
Member	- 224% impact
Meeting	- 213% impact

Here's another interesting subject line trend: Subject lines that contained the word "Newsletter" had an average open rate of 33.09% and higher click-through rates (7.42%) than those that didn't (3.19%). While "newsletter" didn't show up in the top three subject line words, this finding contradicts a widely-accepted best practice for for-profit organizations. For-profit companies generally see low open and click-through rates for emails with the word "newsletter" in the subject line, but that seems not to be the case for charitable organizations.



Koshy also identified a few words that impacted click-through rates, including:

WORD	IMPACT ON CTRS
Issue	+ 58% impact
News	+ 48% impact
National	+ 40% impact
Day	- 33% impact
Meeting	- 26% impact

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Want to improve your open rates? The words “support,” “survey,” “donate,” “issue,” “news,” and “national” tend to result in higher open rates and CTRs. What can you glean from that information?

You might notice that two of those words—support and donate—seem to refer directly to an appeal for donations. Other words—“issue,” “news,” and “national”—can be tied to educational and even urgent messaging. The positive impact the word “survey” has on open rates may indicate that people are willing to share their thoughts and feedback about your work and their experiences with your organization. Look for opportunities to include these words (or words that elicit the same emotional response) in your emails.

That said, these words aren’t a silver bullet that will always improve your overall email performance. “The direction of this data indicates that specific asks, and often imperatives, do get people to open emails,” Koshy says. “As a caveat, it’s important to remember that these emails are going to warm accounts. It would be wrong to assume that sending out a single email with the subject “Giving Tuesday: Will You Donate to Support X?” would inflate opens in a campaign sent to a cold list.” In other words, keep your audience in mind when you craft your subject lines. Your existing donors may be willing to open an email about GivingTuesday, but that may not be the case if you’re emailing someone who’s unfamiliar with your organization.

And, for goodness' sake, don’t send an email with the subject line “Reminder: Member Meeting” to your list!

Experiment with Emojis in Subject Lines

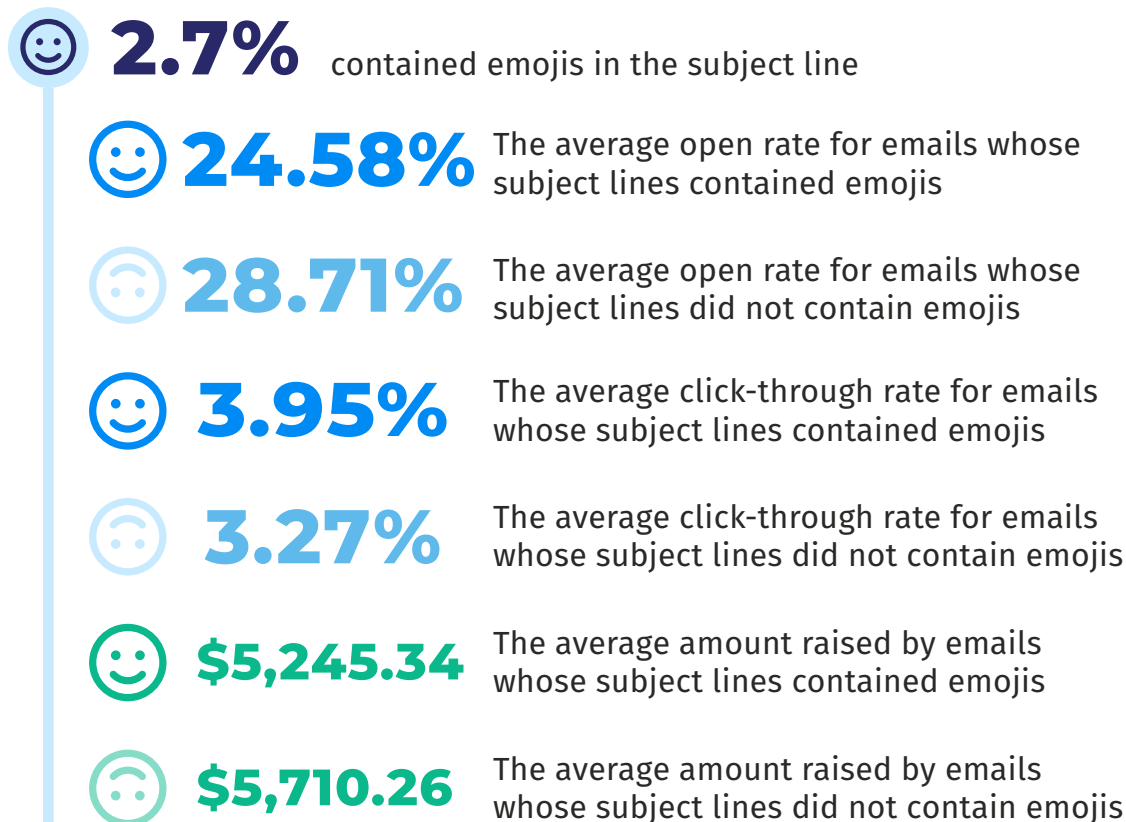
Emojis—small images that can be used in digital text—are popular inclusions in text messages and other communications. But what about subject lines? As more and more emails find their way into your audiences' inboxes, companies vying for their attention may be able to stand out visually by including these characters in their subject lines. But does it work? Can adding an emoji have a positive impact on your email performance?

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Engaging subject lines inspire the best open rates. If you're experimenting with changing the emotions you convey to your readers, you may be tempted to throw in an emoji to drive that sentiment home. But, if you're looking to improve your open rates and other email engagement metrics, you might be worried about trying something new—like using an emoji—that would have a negative impact on your performance.

SUBJECT LINE EMOJIS AND EMAIL PERFORMANCE

In the 157.1 million emails sent through Neon One's systems in 2022,



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

The jury is still out on whether or not emojis are helpful or hurtful. Only a very small percentage of nonprofits sent emails with emojis in their subject lines in 2022, so this is a relatively small sample size.

Open rates for emails with emojis in the subject lines were 4.13% lower than open rates for those without emojis, but click-through rates for those emails were .68% higher. Emails with no emojis in the subject lines raised 8.8% more.

If you're looking for ways to increase your open rates, try including an emoji in your subject line to catch readers' attention and inspire them to read your message. Since click-through rates are slightly lower in emails whose subject lines contain emojis, you can mitigate the risk of negatively impacting your own CTR by making your calls to action and any links very clear and easy to click or tap regardless of the kind of device your readers use to read your message.

Since fundraising totals for emoji-less subject lines tend to be higher, you can take a couple of steps if you want to experiment with including them in your own emails. You could first try experimenting with sending non-fundraising emails with emojis to your audience: If you don't see any negative impact on your open or click-through rates, you can safely assume your readers aren't bothered by these fun little icons. You might also look into seeing if different segments of donors (like major donors and small-dollar donors, recurring donors and one-time donors, etc.) respond to emojis differently.

Then, you could run an A/B test of a fundraising email with and without an emoji in the subject line. Make sure every other aspect of your email is the same—the only variant should be the inclusion of an emoji—and send tests to a small group of donors. See which one performs best! This will be easiest if you either use UTM codes (links that contain snippets of code to help you track content performance) to track which donations come from which test email. You could also create two identical donation forms and use one for each test.

Your email service provider should include the opportunity to conduct A/B tests with a small group of subscribers, then automatically send the most successful version of your email to the rest of your list. It's a great way to see if emojis positively or negatively impact your fundraising.

Write Compelling Preview Text

Preview text is a snippet of copy that briefly informs people what is in your email and why they should read it. This copy appears alongside your email's subject line in the list view your readers see of their inbox, and it's generally used to give people a summary of what the email contains. Since this is so prominently displayed in inboxes, your preview text can impact your audiences' willingness to open and read your email.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

After your subject line, your preview text is the most immediately visible part of your email when it hits your contacts' inboxes. Readers will frequently scan your preview text to get a feel for what your message contains, why it might be valuable to them, and whether or not they want to read your email. It's easy to forget to include preview text when you're building your email, and it's even easier to hastily write your preview text before moving onto the body of your email. Should you spend time on preview text? Will it help improve your performance?

Let's find out.

PREVIEW TEXT & NONPROFIT EMAIL PERFORMANCE



Emails that included preview text raised

53.85% MORE than those that did not



29.55% Open rate for emails that included preview text



27.29% Open rate for emails that did not include preview text



3.04% Click-through rate on emails that included preview text



3.63% Click-through rate on emails that did not include preview text

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

The impact of preview text on fundraising emails is pretty clear-cut: Emails that included preview text raised almost 54% more than emails that didn't. When you're sending a fundraising email, try to include some preview text.

You may be wondering about the lower click-through rates for emails that contained preview text, especially since preview text had a positive impact on open rates. There are a few elements to consider here. The first is that some emails that contained preview text may not have included many opportunities to click from the message to another page. The second is that there's only a 0.59% discrepancy between the click-through rates for emails, which means there's lots of room for experimentation here.

To mitigate the minor risk of readers not clicking on links included in an email that also includes preview text, make sure your CTAs are clearly written and easy to act upon. You may even want to experiment with linking to a form or other page more than once: Koshy noted that more links to a form resulted in a higher click rate for the form. [You can find his analysis of this trend on page 54.](#)

Words to Include (or Avoid) in Your Preview Text

Your subject line should catch readers' attention, and your preview text should give them an idea about the type of content they'll find when they open your message. But preview texts are generally short, so every word counts. Koshy used the same methodology to identify words that both help and harm open rates.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Different sources will recommend slightly different character limits for preview text. But, while recommendations range anywhere from 40 to 140 characters, one thing stays the same—preview text should be succinct. And, since preview text can have a dramatic impact on your open rates and fundraising performance, every character you include in this part of your message should be carefully chosen. Koshy's findings can help you identify what words you do (and don't!) want to include.

PREVIEW TEXT WORD USAGE DATA

WORD	IMPACT ON OPEN RATES
Together	+ 225% impact
Hear	+ 206% impact
Video	+ 193% impact
Deadline	+ 190% impact
This	- 15% impact

The machine learning system also identified a few words that had a positive impact on click-through rates, including:

WORD	IMPACT ON CTRS
Programs	+ 22% impact
Program	+ 18% impact
Nature	+ 18% impact
News	+ 18% impact

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Preview text may seem like a minor element in your overall email message, but it can make a big impression on donors. Take a look at these words and their impact on email performance. What do the words “together,” “hear,” “video,” “deadline,” “program(s),” “nature,” and “news” have in common? What kind of emotion or expectation would you feel when you saw one of those words in your own inbox? You might feel like you're part of a group, that your feedback or experiences are valuable, that you'll find engaging content in the email, or that you'll learn about a program or campaign you might want to support. Channel those feelings into your own messages' preview text and see how your audience responds.

Put It All Together: Performance Benchmarks & Word Usage

Performance benchmarks, subject line analyses, and preview text data are all helpful when planning your email campaigns and evaluating their effectiveness. When you put them all together, you can use them to identify what you're doing well, what your audience loves, and where you can improve.

Say, for example, you have a relatively low click-through rate. First, you can look at your open rates: If your open rates are high but your click-through rate is low, you can focus on making sure your calls to action are appropriate for the content, compellingly written, and easy to click on. If you notice your open rates are low, though, you might instead choose to focus your attention on creating more compelling subject lines and preview text. If you still see room for improvement, you could experiment with sending your messages on different days of the week or at different times of day.



03



To:

Creating Effective Emails

Subject:

These five strategies will make your emails' content more interesting and encourage readers to act

Optimizing your open and click-through rates are important, of course, but the real magic is in the content of your email.

Neon One clients use our email system to send all kinds of different messages, including newsletters, appeals, impact updates, event invitations, membership signup reminders, and more. We wish we had the resources to read and evaluate the content of all 37,472 email campaigns our clients sent in 2022. But we couldn't! That said, emails' content does have an impact on some of the benchmarks we included in this report. An exceptionally compelling email appeal will increase the number of people who click through to a donation form. An invitation to a beloved fundraising event will inspire high engagement numbers. And an organization whose emails are consistently entertaining or educational will see relatively high open rates.

That sounds like a lot of caveats. What we can offer is some tips and strategies for creating email messages that engage your donors and inspire them to get involved. We'll also take a look at the single most engaging email of 2022 to see what these best practices look like in real life.

[Send](#)[Save](#)[Cancel](#)

To:

Ask The Expert

Subject:

What Should I Keep In Mind When Creating Compelling Emails?

A savvy nonprofit communicator should begin every significant email effort by asking themselves a few clarifying questions to create effective email communications, such as:

- Who is my target audience, and what are their interests?
- What specific message do I want to convey in this email, and what action do I want the recipient to take?
- How can I make this email stand out in the recipient's inbox?

Some practical strategies nonprofits can adopt to make email communication more impactful and readable include:

- Shortening sentences and paragraphs
- Segmenting email lists
- Using clear calls to action (CTAs) throughout (especially within the masthead image)
- Using storytelling to create emotional connections with readers

Improve the user experience by optimizing email speed and load time by preemptively compressing images. For those using email marketing platforms, segmentation and personalization allow content creators to tailor messages to specific audiences, resulting in increased engagement, higher open and click-through rates, and, ultimately, better outcomes.



Nicole Akoukou Thompson

Director of Content, Rudd Resources

Send

Save

Cancel



TIP #1

Include Imagery in Your Emails

Humans are hardwired to respond to images, especially when those images include faces. Including an image in your email will help capture readers' attention; images of people will be even more effective. In an experiment by research firm NextAfter¹, a nonprofit organization sent two versions of an email promoting their newest online course: One version contained an image, the other did not. They conducted an A/B test to see which performed better—the version that contained an image in addition to the copy saw a 129% higher click-through rate than the version that did not. Adding an image to your email can have a tremendous impact on your overall performance.

Choosing good imagery can also help readers connect emotionally with your message! According to Canva², a graphic design tool used to create digital images, “If there is something our brains love more than an image, it’s an emotion. Though you can of course get emotion across in words, we are masters at reading other people’s faces for emotional cues ... Because we are always on the lookout for emotional cues in images, especially of people, these are a great way to get across positive emotions to associate with your brand.”

The takeaway here is straightforward: Use imagery in your emails. Your readers (and your performance metrics) will thank you.

- When using pictures of people, choose images that include peoples’ faces.
- People-centered images will be most effective when readers can connect with the subjects. Look for images that include one to three people, ideally people who are making eye contact with the camera.
- When using text-based images, make sure the font you use is clear and easy to read.
- Text-based images should be easy to read—use high-contrast colors and fonts that are clearly visible against the background.
- If supported by your email service provider, include alt text that describes the image. This is an important part of creating accessible email messages to users who rely on screen readers and other accessibility features.

Sending test versions of emails is always a good idea. It’s especially important when your emails contain imagery! Make sure to look at your test email on a few different devices to make sure your images don’t impact your deliverability, load quickly, and display properly.

¹NextAfter. (2021, March 3). How images in an email affect Clickthrough Rate. Experiments. Retrieved February 24, 2023, from <https://www.nextafter.com/experiments/how-images-in-an-email-affect-clickthrough-rate/>

²Tate, A. (2021, August 16). 10 scientific reasons people are wired to respond to your visual marketing. Canva Visual Marketing. Retrieved February 24, 2023, from <https://www.canva.com/video-editor/visual-marketing/>



TIP #2

Pay Attention to Salutations

Humans love images. We also love hearing (and reading) our own names. A 2006 study by the Institute for the Study of Child Development³ found that hearing one's own name resulted in a “unique brain activation” that mirrors the same way our brains respond to activities and thought patterns we associate with our core identity and personality markers. Our names are deeply tied to our sense of self.

That's why including a personalized salutation in your email is so important. When you use an email recipient's name in your salutation, you tell them that your email is meant for them, on a personal level. They may know rationally that your email was sent to many recipients, but the personalized opening makes it feel special. It works—another NextAfter experiment⁴ found that using a personalized salutation resulted in a 26% increase in click-through rates in a nonprofit email.

Your email service provider should give you the ability to use personalization tokens to insert your recipients' names in your email salutations. You may also be able to add their name to your body copy, calls to actions, and even subject lines! Experiment with making your emails feel more personal by strategically using your readers' names, then track how it impacts your performance metrics.

If your email service provider doesn't allow personalization—or if you need to add a

“fallback” salutation—use something that appeals to your readers' identities. Opening an email with something like “Dear Animal Hero” or “Hello, Nature Lovers!” will stand out in a sea of “Dear Friends” salutations.



³Carmody DP, Lewis M. Brain activation when hearing one's own and others' names. *Brain Res.* 2006 Oct 20;1116(1):153-8. doi: 10.1016/j.brainres.2006.07.121. Epub 2006 Sep 7. PMID: 16959226; PMCID: PMC1647299.

⁴NextAfter. (2021). Does personalizing an email focusing on a premium resource increase clicks for pathway to victory? Experiments. Retrieved February 24, 2023, from <https://www.nextafter.com/experiments/does-personalizing-an-email-focusing-on-a-premium-resource-increase-clicks-for-pathway-to-victory/>

To:

Ask The Expert

Subject:

Do Salutations Really Make a Difference?

The power of your name is undeniable. Even hearing it faintly in a crowd can instantly capture your attention and draw you in. This is because your brain is designed to filter through the massive amount of information it receives every day to focus on what's relevant to you.

In the same way, when a donor reads something from you, their brain is working to determine if it's relevant to them. The more personalized your communication, the more likely you'll keep their attention. You'll also create a meaningful connection. And, thanks to Philanthropic Psychology, we know that when you meet a donor's need for connection, you can improve their well-being—and your organization's fundraising response rates.

To make your donor communications as personal and engaging as possible, use their name in the salutation. Saying "Hi [Donor's Name]" is a simple yet effective way to build connection. It shows you're taking the time to get to know the person behind the donation. As Dale Carnegie famously said, "A person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language." So why not make it a centerpiece of your donor communications ... and start building a strong relationship today!



Julie Cooper

Fundraising Copywriter, JB Cooper LLC

Send

Save

Cancel



TIP #3

Use the Word “You”

Think of using someone’s name like you’d use salt in a recipe. A strategic sprinkle here or there elevates the dish. Too much salt ruins the whole thing. Repeatedly using someone’s name can quickly feel unnatural, but you can achieve a similar result by using the word “you” instead.

The average nonprofit uses the word “you” four to five times per email. The most engaged-with email of 2022 used it 10 times! Unlike using someone’s name, repeating the word “you” doesn’t feel unnatural or forced. When you write your copy, focus on using more “you” language than language you use to refer to yourself or your organization. Your readers will love it.



TIP #4

Make Your Message Scannable

Your readers receive hundreds of emails every week. Some receive more than a hundred a day! There’s no way someone could deeply read every message they receive—many will frequently scan an email to see if they’re interested in reading further.

If you want to engage your email recipients, make your message easy to scan. Here are some things you can try:

- Choose a font that’s easy to read. This generally means avoiding elaborate fonts, using a font size that’s easily decipherable on different devices—typically 12- to 14-point font—and a font color that contrasts with your email’s background.
- Embrace white space. Even the most passionate supporters don’t want to read a wall of text! Adding line breaks between paragraphs, using wide margins, and making

sure to add plenty of space around images will make your email easier to read.

- Try using bulleted lists. They’re easier to scan and help people process the information you’re presenting to them. There’s a reason this list is broken up into bullet points instead of a single long paragraph!
- Bold key words and phrases. When someone scans your message, any bolded words will stand out from the surrounding text. Try bolding important takeaways, specific calls to action, thank-you language, and anything else you want to stand out.

When your email is easy to scan, you boost the likelihood of catching your readers’ attention and inspiring them to read the rest of your message more closely.



TIP #5

Include Great Calls to Action

Most of your emails will include a call to action. A call to action refers to anything you want your audience to do once they've read your message, whether it be to read a blog article, watch a video, or make a gift. Whatever you want your readers to do, three things will make them most likely to act: Making your request early, making it specific, and making it easy to act upon.



To:

Ask The Expert

Subject:

How Do I Create a Great Call to Action?

If you want your audience to take action and convert through your email marketing, it is important to be clear about what action you wish them to take. Oftentimes, we want to say "all the things" in our emails. However, that can confuse and overwhelm our audience. One of my favorite sayings from Brene Brown is this: "Clear is kind." I believe this to be true for how we communicate with our organization's constituents in email. Do not confuse your audience with too many calls to action, and too many things to do. Be kind, keep it simple, and be clear about what they should do next. Limit your calls to action to one per email (yes, just one!) and make it easy to identify that it is a call to action. From a design perspective, that means making the call-to-action button or link stand out and being specific in the wording you are using so that your audience knows exactly what you mean by clicking on that button.



Taylor Shanklin

CEO of Barlele + Creative Shizzle

Send

Save

Cancel

Some emails may include multiple calls to action. Newsletters are a great example: You may ask people to read updates, fill out surveys, watch a video, or engage with your content on other channels. Some emails will be most effective if you only have a single call to action: Appeals for donations, volunteers, or membership enrollment fall into this category. In either case, include your main call to action toward the beginning of the email so your readers quickly understand what you want them to do.

Your audience will be more likely to act if it's easy for them to respond to what you want them to do. High-priority calls to action should be very easy to click or tap: Try using buttons or hyperlinked images instead of only using text hyperlinks. That's not to say there's never a time or place for hyperlinked texts, but it's much easier to click on larger design elements—especially when you're reading an email on your mobile device.

While we couldn't analyze data about the content of each email sent through Neon One's systems in 2022, we could identify some interesting patterns about buttons and links to forms. We looked at links to any Neon CRM forms, including donation forms, volunteer interest forms, event signup forms, membership enrollment forms, etc. Across all of the email campaigns in our dataset, each email averaged around one button per message. Small nonprofits included fewer than one button per message, which may indicate that there's room for that group to engage their supporters by using buttons to facilitate clicks.

As we evaluated buttons and form links in emails, we wondered if we could find any best practices around the number of times a nonprofit links to a form. Cherian Koshy and his AI-driven data analysis revealed that more links to a form created a higher click-through rate to that same form. If you're worried about, say, linking to a donation form multiple times in an appeal, don't be—it won't harm your clickthrough rate.

# OF LINKS TO A FORM	IMPACT ON CLICKS TO THAT FORM
1	- 7.83% impact
2	- 7.21% impact
3	+ 1.56% impact
4	- 1.6% impact
5	+ 5.81 impact
6	+ 10.09 impact
8	+ 1.7 impact
11	+ 2.4 impact

Put It All Together: Build Clear, Compelling Emails

Your email's body copy will impact your campaigns' success!

Use imagery to catch your readers' attention and get them interested in what you have to say. You can get them even more invested in your email by strategically using their name in your salutation and body copy and by prioritizing "you" language in your content. When you make your email easy to scan and include eye-catching calls to action that are easy to interact with, you're well on your way to creating an engaging email that will inspire your readers to do what you want them to do.

04



To:

Lessons from the Most Engaging Email of 2022

Subject:

What do these best practices look like in real life?
Take a look!



Data points are helpful. But what does an engaging email actually look like?

In this section, you'll take a look at the most engaged-with email of 2022. It was sent by Science Olympiad in October, and it includes many of the data-backed best practices you've explored so far. Let's take a look.

[Send](#)[Save](#)[Cancel](#)

If you're having trouble viewing this email, you can [see it online](#).

2

1



Program News

3

Dear Science Olympiad Community,

We're glad you're here with us for the 2023 Season! Already more than 15,000 of you have downloaded the rules - we've loved to see all the enthusiasm teams have as we start the year! If you haven't already done so, [use this link to download the Rules](#) and get your season started!



5

Additionally, last week we launched our [new 2023 brochures](#)! Download the full the brochure, or use the [2-pagers](#) for students, teachers/coaches, school administrators, host universities, and employee mentors/volunteers to help grow your team and program this year!

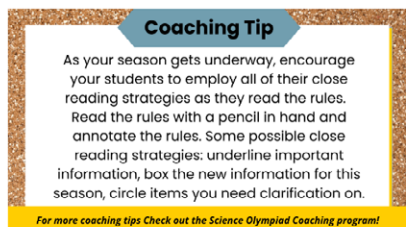


4

New Science Olympiad Resources

We've got all new resources available to complement the 2023 Season in the Science Olympiad Store! The best-selling [starter packs and stacks](#) from last year are back with all-new refreshed content, and there are new [digital download DVDs](#) for events like for Flight and Scrambler, and the [2023 National Test Packet](#) is also available! [Check out the whole catalog!](#)

We're also thrilled to report that [Ward's Science Kits](#) are ready for the 2023 Season! This year there are kits for Bridge, Can't Judge a Powder, Chemistry, Chem Lab, Crime Busters, Detector Building, Flight, Forensics, Scrambler, Rocks & Minerals, and Wheeled Vehicle. [Check out the kit offerings](#) and use promo code **SOVIP2022** to save 12% on your order!



1. Clear Subject Line

This email's subject line—"Science Olympiad News - October 2023"—is clear and easy to understand. Recipients would know exactly what kind of information they'll find inside.

2. Preview Text

This email didn't include any preview text. This is proof positive that data is most useful as a guide, not as a hard rule! Since the sender ("Science Olympiad News") and subject line are so clear, recipients could tell what was inside even without preview text.

3. Salutation

This email is addressed to the "Science Olympiad Community," which is an excellent fallback salutation. It appeals to the recipients' identity with the organization and its mission if their names don't populate.

4. "Program" and "News"

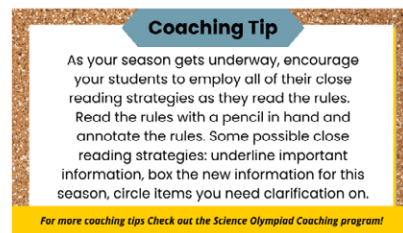
Remember seeing these words in our analysis of subject lines and preview texts? These words had a great impact on email engagement rates, and they're front and center in this email.

5. Early CTA

This newsletter-style email is full of calls to action. But the primary CTA appears in the first paragraph of the body copy, and it's reiterated in an eye-catching image that's easy to click on. This image got 1,149 clicks!

6. Eye-Catching Images

No walls of text here! This email's copy is broken up by multiple images that serve to reinforce the overall message. Check out that "Coaching Tip" image: It's a great way to convey important information.



6

7. Scannable Body Copy

The body copy in this email is easy to scan. They use images, white space, bullet points, and bolded text to make it as easy as possible to find different categories of information.

8. Multiple Links

This email includes lots of different opportunities to interact with the organization that sent it. Notice that the text for each of the hyperlinks clearly convey what the reader will see when they click!

9. People-Centric Imagery

This image follows several best practices: It includes a single person, and the person's face is clearly visible. While the subject isn't making eye contact, they are looking at the project in front of them, which reiterates the call to action to sign up for the STEM resources the subject is apparently using.

10. Clickable Images

In addition to communicating key information and breaking up long stretches of copy, these images are hyperlinked to their corresponding pages. By looking at a single image, a reader can see important info, understand what the organization wants to do, and respond to the call to action.

Program Updates

Division B & C

- Mark your calendars for [Wednesday, October 12th](#) for our workshop with the University of Delaware on **Forestry, Agriculture & Natural Resources!** If you're competing in Forestry, Green Generation, Environmental Chem this year you won't want to miss this! Hear about college majors and applied science careers like: Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, Plant Science, Environmental and Resource Economics, and more! Two lucky registrants will also win the Science Olympiad Coaching Program guide, a \$200 value! [Register for this workshop.](#)

7



- Join us on [Wednesday, October 26th](#) for a Workshop Wednesday on Science Olympiad Team Fundraising! Need cash for your team expenses like kits, food, and travel? Join the Science Olympiad National Office and our national fundraising partners at Double Good Popcorn for a webinar on team fundraising! We'll share tips and resources for fundraising as well as prepare you to participate in our first-ever Science Olympiad National Fundraising Week, November 14-18. All teams can participate, and we'll offer prizes and incentives for really "popping" teams! Register [here](#).

MY SO

- Last month in [MY SO](#), we tackled the wave events - Crave the Wave, Sounds of Music, and Wifi Lab. This month, we're covering Forestry! Download the [new lesson plan & resources](#), and catch last month's [STEM Session video](#)! And in case you missed it, this year, the STEM Quiz assessment at the end of the month is free for all students to participate in - check the [MY SO page](#) on October 25th for the links to participate!

8

Elementary

- Need a great team activity that helps your community at the same time? Plan a STEM night at your local elementary school this year! We have all the plans you need in our [Fun Day/Fun Night](#) and [Virtual Fun Day/Fun Night Manuals](#)!

See you next month!

The Science Olympiad National Office Team



This email was sent to {{Recipient Email}}. [Click here to unsubscribe.](#)

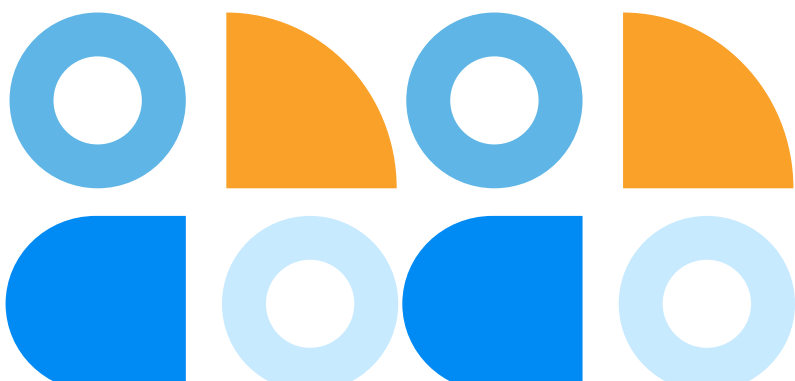


Use These Data-Backed Best Practices to Build More Engaging Emails

These data points are more than interesting benchmarks: They work together to create a roadmap for building more engaging emails. Tracking individual benchmarks can be interesting, but these findings are most helpful when you look at all of them together. Your open rate is a helpful metric to track. But tracking your open rate, click-through rates, unsubscribe rates, fundraising performance, and other key data points can paint a picture of your supporters. You can learn what motivates them, what information they find interesting, which campaigns and programs resonate most with them, and even which words and phrases inspire them to support your cause.

We hope these benchmarks and other findings will help you engage your base of supporters. Remember: No two nonprofits are the same, and no two organizations have the same audiences. Whether you're surpassing these benchmarks or see opportunities to improve, these data points can serve as a compass that will help point you in the right direction.

Good luck! We can't wait to see what you achieve.



Methodology & Appendix

The original research in this report uses email campaign data from the Neon CRM database of Neon One customers. For our analysis, we aggregated Campaign Email data from across our customer base and appended data from public records on the organization to produce the top-line results described in this report. For the content and sentiment analysis, a separate methodology will be outlined below.

The Dataset

For our research, we extracted a dataset of all Campaign Emails successfully attempted from Neon CRM databases where the recorded delivery completed date was between January 1, 2021, and December 31, 2022. These records included standard email campaign data like date and time sent, number of opens by user, clicks total, and other raw data points outlined below.

This primary dataset was then supplemented with additional data points from linked public records on the organization. Organizational data, including the organization's Employer Identification Number (for U.S.-based organizations only), was used to link a variety of data points from Form 990 records. These records are publicly available for exempt organizations in the United States. Our research focused specifically on organizations' National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) codes and income reported on Form 990.

The financial analysis was performed on the same dataset but restricted its completed delivery dates to November 29, 2022; December 29, 2022; December 30, 2022; and December 31, 2022. Unless otherwise noted, this analysis blended averages from across the year in which the emails were sent and any multi-year analysis was used solely for year over year trends insights.

The Neon CRM transactions include all types of fundraising and revenue activity that clients may have entered during that time period, regardless of the donor's interaction with the emails sent on those days. Transactions include both online and offline transactions.

Terminology and Definitions

To ensure that there is a consistent understanding of terminology, the following definitions have been established with respect to key points within the report.

Campaign Email: Any email sent through the Email Campaigns feature of Neon CRM. This allows emails to be sent to many individuals at one time and its delivery is managed by the administrators of the database.

Date and time sent (delivery completed): The timestamp when delivery has been attempted to all emails in the email audience. For context, there are separate columns for “Delivery Started” and “Delivery Completed” in the Email Campaign Statistics list. These timestamps are often identical, but if the email audience is very large, it may take time for our email servers to process everything. Any timestamps are in Central Daylight Time (CDT).

Opens by user: Total number of email audience recipients who opened the email campaign.

Clicks total: Total number of times that links in the email campaign were clicked. Includes multiple clicks by the same recipient, as well as any clicks that occur after a recipient forwards the email to someone else.

Clicks by user: Total number of email audience recipients who clicked on links in the email campaign. Includes any clicks that occur after a recipient forwards the email to someone else (if the original recipient did not click on the link, but the forwarded recipient did).

Bounces: Total number of email addresses in the email audience which were unable to receive the email campaign (ex: mailbox full). Clicking on this number within the Email Campaign Statistics detail page will display a general bounce category. Users can run the Email Report to see more detailed information from recipients' email servers as to why the emails bounced.

Unsubscribed: Total number of email audience recipients who clicked the Unsubscribe link in the email campaign and completed the email opt out process.

Email Subject Line: This copy appears as the subject line of the email and is prominently displayed to recipients.

Preview Text: This copy appears in the inbox after the subject line.

Emoji: A small digital image or icon used to express an idea, emotion, etc.

Sender Name: This is the text that displays as the name of the sender.

Sender Email: This is the email that displays as the sender.

Metrics Definitions

To ensure a consistent understanding of terminology, the following definitions have been established with respect to key metrics and formulas within the report. In analyzing any data relating to list size and corresponding benchmark data, the reporting rule was to round up to the nearest whole number.

Open Rate: The percentage of email recipients who open a given email campaign. A note about the impact of Apple's iOS 15 changes on open rates has been included in the report.

Click-through Rate (CTR): The percentage of email recipients who clicked on one or more links contained in a given email. Unless otherwise designated, this report uses the following formula to calculate this:

$$(\text{Total clicks} / \text{number of delivered emails}) \times 100$$

Bounce Rate: The percentage of total emails sent that could not be successfully delivered to the recipient's inbox. This report uses the following formula to calculate this:

$$(\text{Total number of hard bounced emails} / \text{number of emails sent}) \times 100$$

Unsubscribe Rate: The percentage of email recipients who unsubscribed from the send list after opening a given email. This report uses the following formula to calculate this:

$$(\text{Total unsubscribes} / \text{number of delivered emails}) \times 100$$

Average Amount Raised Per Email: This references the transaction totals divided by the number of campaign emails sent within the time period established.

Average Amount Raised Per Contact: This references the transaction totals divided by the average number of recipients attempted per email campaign within the time period established.

Analysis by Mission & Organization Income

Some findings described in this report relate to email campaigns according to an organization's mission or income. We relied on the organizational data appended to the primary dataset. For this analysis, we aggregated the key metrics and grouped them by the organizations' NTEE Major Group codes and income codes designated by the IRS based on the organization's reported income on Form 990.

Analysis by Time & Date Sent

The findings described in this report that relate to email campaigns' effectiveness by day and time sent were performed first by separating the day and time data and analyzing against each field separately. The dates were then organized by the day of the week campaigns were sent and focused on the aggregate average across the entire campaign dataset. The time of day data focused on an aggregate average across the entire campaign data set. Then, once the average was established, further analysis was performed to extend to the five minutes before and after these averages. All analysis was performed in Central Standard Time.

Analysis by Content Sentiment

For the purpose of this report, a dataset of subject lines from nonprofit emails was collected and analyzed using an AI-powered sentiment analysis tool. The task of sentiment analysis is crucial for nonprofits looking to automate the assessment of subject lines, social media text, and messages as positive, negative, or neutral.

However, this traditional method of sentiment analysis is limited, as it only categorizes emotions into three types. A more advanced approach would be to identify specific emotions, such as anger or disapproval in negative text and caring or admiration in positive text.

Previously, the process of understanding the emotions behind the text was time-consuming and relied on human empathy. But, with the advent of large language models, nonprofits can now quickly and cost-effectively classify emotions in the text through automation.

For the purposes of this report, we classified each subject line using OpenAI's Davinci-003 model as one of the following 27 emotions: Admiration, Approval, Annoyance, Gratitude, Disapproval, Amusement, Curiosity, Love, Optimism, Disappointment, Joy, Realization, Anger, Sadness, Confusion, Caring, Excitement, Surprise, Disgust, Desire, Fear, Remorse, Embarrassment, Nervousness, Pride, Relief, Grief, or Neutral (not counted as an emotion).

GPT-J provides a better opportunity for emotional analysis and an updated finding will be shared when these tools can more easily and quickly ingest the volume of data provided. Davinci-003

did create some noise in the classification that slightly impacted the findings. For example, if the completion output was “The sentiment is love” instead of “love,” that may have slightly impacted the data interpretation. It is possible our natural language query of the database excluded this result. However, this was a very small percentage of the overall output.

Data Privacy & Security

Per the [Neon One product terms](#), Customer Data for this report was aggregated, de-identified, and anonymized in a manner that does not designate or identify Customers or its Authorized Users as the source of such data. All aggregated totals that did not include a certain threshold of records to sufficiently anonymize individual donors or organizations were discarded.

About Neon One

Neon One provides social good organizations with connected fundraising tools and services they need to help fulfill their mission. The team works hard to help nonprofits raise more money and build sustainable, long-term growth with software, services, and resources. Their products are designed to manage the full range of nonprofit operational needs, from fundraising and donor management to program operations and financial reconciliation. Learn more about the products, including Neon CRM, Neon Websites, Neon CCM, Neon Giving Days, Neon Fundraise, Neon Pay, and more at neonone.com.