

# How to make a profit from emailing schools

**Hamilton House Mailings** has devised what is probably the most accurate and responsive range of email lists of teachers on the market today.

In the past year we've used these lists ourselves time and again in order to find out how the best response rates can be achieved – and here's our report.

## 1. Does it have to be email?

Some companies choose to use email not because it is the right medium for them, but because it is perceived as the cheapest way to reach schools.

If you have chosen email simply because of cost, we urge you to take care and ensure that your campaign really does fit into email's requirements. The most successful campaigns use email because it is the right medium for that campaign – as explained below. In the final section of this article there is a note about how you might proceed if you are planning an email campaign for the first time.

## 2. The format of successful email campaigns

Virtually all the successful email campaigns we have seen have one or more of the following approaches within them.

### 2.1 Text email on its own

This is email at its simplest, containing a sales approach (see 2.3 below), and a variety of methods of ordering (by phone, fax, email, online, post).

This method only works with sales or one or two products that can be described in text. If you are trying to sell products that absolutely must be seen, or if you are trying to offer a range of options, you must have a website.

### 2.2 Text with website

This is the simple variation on 2.1 but it allows illustration of the product on the website and (if you wish to give the reader a choice) a route in to your own catalogue. Where you have a website, by far the best approach is to have the benefits and selling point on the email and the features and illustrations on the website.

All website links must be to the specific page relating to the product, not to a general web page in the hope that the person will be impressed by everything that is on your site. The average time spent on a website is 50 seconds – people don't meander around on web sites, unless they are utterly committed.

If you do not have a website, HHM has a team that can obtain web addresses, design suitable landing pages, host the website and arrange the email addresses for you. We can also shorten long web page addresses. Please call if you would like information on any of these services.

In addition to the web link, your email advert must include in your promotion a phone

number, a fax number, your full postal address and your email address for enquiries and orders. Teachers trust firms that display their postal address as much as their email address.

Remember, many teachers won't be able to go onto your website at work because they don't have internet access available in the right place at the right time – which is why the other forms of communication are important.

### 2.3 The sales approach

You must promote in the email using one of the five standard sales approaches that work. However, what many firms do is ignore this and instead use a sixth approach that does not work. Here are the six approaches. The notes below are a very simple summary – please call if you would like more information

- a) **The announcement.** This says, I've got this, it's for sale, and it's good. This only works if the reader absolutely wants the product and knows he/she wants the product. Otherwise it is a flop. (A variation on the announcement is the announcement with features lists – that also normally flops).
- b) **Price.** A very common approach but expensive (you are cutting your profits) and you are instantly doing what everyone else does. It rarely works – although it can if you offer a refund plus 10% if the buyer finds any other firm undercutting you.
- c) **Benefit.** The classic approach that works. Tell them the benefits (not the features) of your product.
- d) **Interesting questions.** A variation on the benefit. You start by asking your reader an open question such as "What is the most effective way of taking your D students up to a grade C at GCSE?" But note that closed questions virtually never work.
- e) **Emotional appeals.** Traditionally used for cars, holidays, jewels, clothes, beer – but increasingly used in experiments with other products.
- f) **Humour.** Works brilliantly on continuing campaigns, but hard to pull off on a single advert. Because most firms are afraid of using humour you normally get the field to yourself, and that gives you a head start. Some firms are now using this in mailings to schools and having great success.

### 2.4 The tone of the message

Your email advert should be written as a conversational piece, not a set of announcements, bullet points, SHOUTS!!! and the like. Don't write anything you would never say face-to-face, in a one-to-one conversation with your potential customer.

## 3. To whom are you promoting?

Promotions need to be directed to a particular person, be it the administrator, the bursar, head, deputy head, head of sixth form, head of IT, head of special needs (SENCO), or individual heads of departments.

In primary schools subject heads are replaced by co-ordinators, but there is often a lot to be made out of contacting individual class teachers who are responsible for a single year (e.g. The Year 6 Teacher).

However, roles and responsibilities are changing fast, so don't assume that what you knew to be true for three years ago is true now. Nor should you take one group of schools as an example of all schools.

For example...

**The Administrator** was at one time nothing more than the secretary – now s/he is most likely to be the person running the timetable, the supply teacher system, the government statistics, the attendance calculations, staff induction, and the parental liaison programme via the learning platform. It is also more than likely that s/he is going to be at the heart of the new “school efficiency” programme initiated by the Audit Commission in 2009.

**The Headteacher** is increasingly the liaison officer between the school and the local authority, governors and government. Don't try to get messages to staff by sending them to the head expecting him/her to pass the item on – it doesn't happen.

**The Deputy Head** is much more the person who will take on new projects – especially those that move across subject areas or which are too expensive for one subject area to take on.

Finally, do remember that there is no set or standard internal structure for schools. Their duty is to provide education. If they find a way of doing it that doesn't look like any school in terms of its internal structure, that is up to them. So although we can talk in general terms, you will find many schools that are different.

#### 4. The subject line

There's been a huge amount written concerning the correct number of characters to have in a subject line – but in reality advertising is not like that. There are some rules but there are always creative people who can break them and get better results.

If you are using a “generic” mail system (where the mail goes to the administrator and she passes it on to the teacher) you have no alternative but to use the subject line to say who your email is for (as in Attn: The Headteacher). Only write to one person – don't try to say “Attn Head of English / The Librarian / Head of PSHE”. With these no-one gets it.

Beware of lists that appear to be personalized but are in fact addressed to the school's generic email address (usually admin@ or office@) but which then are addressed to the head by name in the subject line. These don't work – most heads are never going to see these, because the administrator will look first, see it is an advert, and delete it.

For personal emails you can use the subject line to grab attention. Don't feel it has to be a short piece – as long as the first few words are exciting this can work.

#### 5. The headline

Just as you would write a headline in a paper promotion, write a headline in your email promotion – ideally in bold maybe just two points bigger font than the rest of your text.

The best headlines for educational adverts generally either stress a benefit or ask an interesting question – although as noted above there are alternatives

## 6. The text

Don't be misled into the idea that anyone can write a good email advert in ten minutes. Professional writers tend to take several hours to compose a text-based email advert – and the result of this dedication is shown in the response rate. The response rate from a professional written advert can be four times the response rate of an advert written by someone who has not been writing adverts for years and years.

If you do want to write the advert yourself, follow these rules.

First, study some highly effective adverts and see how they work

Secondly, take your time and work on your advert without distraction. (For what it is worth, when I started writing adverts I had already written some ten or fifteen books, and yet still would take a whole weekend over a single advertisement).

Thirdly, in writing take your time getting to the point of the advert – don't just announce your product. If selling on price make sure you are the cheapest – remember anyone can put out an email advert a week later and be cheaper! Don't change fonts, don't use colour text except for things like the ordering details at the foot of the email (and then only use one colour), and do write in perfect English.

Fourth, **DON'T USE CAPITALS or lots of bold**. Don't keep repeating your link to your site. Once is enough at the end. Write to an intelligent individual who is interested in teaching and learning.

Fifth, when the advert is complete, give it to someone who knows about adverts. Whatever you do, don't give it to some teachers and say, "would you buy from this?" You will always get the wrong answer, for the simple reason that a lot of the effectiveness for an advert comes from the state of mind of the recipient. Ask a teacher to read an advert aimed at a teacher and the state of mind changes. If you want to you can send it to me and I will give you my thoughts. No charge, no obligation. Just email [tony@hamilton-house.com](mailto:tony@hamilton-house.com).

## 7. Colour and design

Don't. That's it – don't. No pictures, no logo, no illustrations, no attachment. Any of that will reduce your response rate by 95% because your advert won't reach most schools because of their filtering systems. Put all your colour and design on your website – but do use an experienced web page designer to do it. The only exception comes with ordering details, as noted above. So after all of your text you might say

You can order the XM98 Robosplodge in any of the following ways

**By post** to EM98, Earlstrees Ct., Earlstrees Rd., Croby, Northants NN17 4HH

**By email** to [Sales@lotsofthings.co.uk](mailto:Sales@lotsofthings.co.uk)

**By fax** to 01536 399 012

**Online** at <http://www.emails.gs>

**By phone** on 01536 399 013

We have not found any other use of colour in emails to work.

## 8. Response rate

There are several types of email list on the market. They are described more fully on [www.emails.gs](http://www.emails.gs) but here is a quick summary

**Generic emails** – the type that go to the school's general address. These are the cheapest lists, but they come with problems. The prime problem is that lots of companies offer these, many of the lists on sale are very poor, and there is no restriction as to their use. A school might get 30 or more emails a day from potential suppliers, and another 100 from spammers.

As a result, sales can be poor. However a well-written advert can still break through and can generate sales levels of over 1%. Click through rates can reach 10%.

**Preference emails.** Despite the problems caused to the school office by the input of large numbers of emails to the generic address each day, a minority of secondary schools still prefer to have all emails come into the school address. To overcome the problem it is possible to put the name of the teacher you want to reach, in the subject list, as well as the title of the teacher. This takes up response rates considerably.

Response rates and click through rates are normally double that achieved for the same campaign on a generic list.

**Personal emails.** These overcome the problem of the overload of emails into school office. It is possible to mail teachers direct. It is also possible to select these lists by type of school, age range of pupils, and location of school. It is also possible to combine a personal and preference email in order to get total coverage of all secondary schools. Personal email lists are only sold by one company (Hamilton House) and their use is strictly limited to one email per teacher per week – something which helps keep the results up.

Personal email lists for primary schools are being introduced for the first time in Autumn 2009.

Sales rates can reach 2.5% and click through rates can rise towards 50%.

**Subscription lists.** Around 50,000 teachers have opted in to the subscription lists of Education Management News. They receive a weekly news item by email, and, quite separately, a weekly advertisement (an advertorial) written in the same style as the articles in the magazine. These lists can be selected by subject area, and have the highest possible rate of return of all email lists. Sales rates of 3% are not unknown. Click through rates of over 50% have been achieved.

In the above, sales rates are measured on single products advertised on an email alone selling at around £20.

## 9. How to choose email, solo or shared

Most successful campaigns start with the most responsive media. If such a mailing does not work, then it cannot be the medium – because you have used the most

responsive medium. If you know the product will sell then it must be the fault of the creative input – and you can change that and try again. (If you start with the cheapest approach, such as shared or generic email, you won't know if the failure is due to the advert or the medium – and that is just too many variables).

With a solo mailing you might well decide to try a mailing of say 300 schools chosen at random from your target list (e.g. 300 schools with sixth forms in England). If you get the result you want, you go on and mail the rest of the country. After that you might try a shared mailing.

With email it is worth starting with either a subscription list or a personal list.

Once you have got the result you want, you can repeat the advert with the preference list, and then move on to the generic list.

Shared mailings and generic email mailings are ideal ways of staying in touch and picking up new enquirers or new sales at very low cost (usually around 5p to 8p per teacher) in between your major solo and personal email campaigns.

## **10. Conclusion**

I hope you found this interesting. There's more on [www.emails.gs](http://www.emails.gs) – or you can call 01536 399 000. We're awfully nice people.

Tony Attwood