

# Email Marketing FAQ

for

K-12 Education Marketers



by Carol Ann Waugh

President,  
Xcellent Marketing

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*NOTE: This FAQ was prepared to answer the specific questions sent in from Roundtable participants in the Heller Roundtable held on February 22, 2002. The answers are based on the business experience of Carol Ann Waugh and do not reflect the opinions of the Heller Group, MDR, or the other Roundtable presenters. Questions that were asked about higher education were excluded since this topic was limited to the K-12 market. Some questions were also eliminated because they were duplicated, too company/product specific, or were unclear. The author of this FAQ has added other questions that might also be of interest to Roundtable participants.*

## About the Author



Carol Ann Waugh  
President  
Xcellent Marketing  
<http://www.xcellentmarketing.com/>  
1163 Vine Street  
Denver, CO 80206  
(303) 388-5215  
FAX (303) 388-0477  
cwaugh@xcellentmarketing.com

**Carol Ann Waugh** has more than 25 years experience in the publishing industry with an emphasis on developing, introducing and marketing new products and services to the library and K-12 education markets. Waugh has executive management experience at TI-IN Network as Vice President of New Business Development, R. R. Bowker as Executive Vice President and Publisher, Progressive Grocer as Vice President and at Butterick Publishing as Vice President. In addition, Waugh started, built and sold an information database company specializing in the microcomputer industry. In 1986, Waugh formed a consulting company and since then, has worked with over 35 publishing companies nationwide to help them develop and refine new marketing strategies. She is also a founder of the Internet Monitor, a company that offers marketing services to companies selling to the education and library markets as well as publishing books for the industry. Carol is the co-author of *i-Tips 2000: The Insiders' Guide to School and Library Marketing* and co-editor of *The Experts' Guide to the K-12 School Market*. Waugh earned her undergraduate degree from New York University and her Masters of Business Administration degree from Pace University.

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**How is email marketing different from SPAM, and how can we be sure that our recipients appreciate the difference?**

Email marketing is based on an "opt-in", permission based agreement between the recipients and your company. SPAM is sending email to people you don't know on a "mass mailing" basis — and hoping someone will respond.

Your " recipients" will know the difference — just as you can easily separate SPAM from other email sent to you. Ways you can reinforce the message that they "signed up" for this service is address them as "subscribers", to reiterate this at the end of each message "You are receiving this email because you subscribed" and giving them instructions to "opt out".

Here is the definition of SPAM from CAUSE (Coalition Against Unsolicited Commercial email): "SPAM ...[is] sending a commercial e-mail to someone with who a marketer has not had any prior business relationship and as being sent to someone who has not asked for the e-mail."

Here are the DMA's e-Mail Guidelines:

**Commercial Solicitations Online Guidelines**

<http://www.The-DMA.org/cgi/dispanouncements?article=158++++++>



**What is the etiquette concerning unsolicited email?**

The etiquette is not to send it!



**What is the "Trusted Sender" Program?**

Two groups have joined together to create a program to improve consumer confidence in email marketing. TRUSTe and ePrivacy Group announced a "Trusted Sender" program, currently in a trial phase, which will offer a seal of certification for commercial e-mail messages.

According to an article posted at:

[http://www.atnewyork.com/news/article/0,1471,8471\\_965751,0.html](http://www.atnewyork.com/news/article/0,1471,8471_965751,0.html)

"Like the online privacy seal program administered by nonprofit TRUSTe, the Trusted Sender effort will allow e-mail recipients to click on a seal or a text link (located in the upper-right corner of an e-mail) and validate the sender's identity using technology from provider ePrivacy. The groups also said the program would offer a dispute-resolution service, through TRUSTe.

Clicking on the seal or link also would verify that the sender follows a set of standards designed to curb SPAM. Those standards include accurate subject lines, the ability to successfully opt-out of future mailings and an adherence to "fair information practice principles and e-mail best practices."

**Read Press Release at:**

<http://www.truste.com/about/TrustedSenderReleaseFINAL.html>



**Where can up-to-date email lists of schools and the individual in the schools be had?**

Both MDR and QED have email addresses for teachers and administrators in the K-12 market. MDR will "append" email addresses to your customer file so you can use the information directly and QED will "mail" to their email addresses and is thinking about offering an appending service in the future. Other permission-based companies also claim to have lists of educators but you need to research these carefully since in most cases, you will find that the person checked off "interested in education" rather than "interested in math programs at the elementary level."



**Are there any legal issues surrounding the use of email campaigns?**

Each state has addressed the issue of SPAM and many have imposed laws regulating it. The federal government has had pending legislation, but nothing has been done on this level yet. Here are some articles written on this topic:

**What are they?**

**Internet Legal Issues: WWW Privacy Policy -- Part I**

<http://www.publaw.com/new.html>

**Do we need written approval before we send the email?**

**Internet Legal Issues: WWW Privacy Policy - Guidelines & Children Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998**

<http://www.publaw.com/wwwprivacy.html>

**Internet Legal Issues: SPAM**

<http://www.publaw.com/spam.html>

**Federal and State Legislative Attempts to "Can" Spam**

<http://www.gigalaw.com/articles/kubiszyn-2000-08-p1.html>



**What is better:  
HTML or text  
based emails?**

Both are effective. Recent studies show that you can get a higher response from well-designed HTML pages but not all browsers can receive the message in this format. Also, there is greater chance of formatting mistakes. Other problems are that this format takes longer to download and some people prefer text-based communications. The most sophisticated companies ask their subscribers for their preference and follow it by offering a choice.



**How often should  
emails be sent?**

It depends on the message. If you have told people who opt-in that they will get a monthly newsletter, you shouldn't change the publication cycle without telling them ahead of time and allowing them to "opt-out".

If you have a vague message "we'll send you offers from time to time", I would start out with a bi-weekly communication. If no one "unsubscribes" after a couple of months, I would try a weekly. Basically, this answer will become very apparent to you. When more people "unsubscribe" than "subscribe" you are either contacting them too often and annoying them, or your message is unwanted.



**What should be in the subject line of the email in order to grab their attention?**

This is a VERY important question since the subject line often determines whether or not the email message is thrown into the trash without opening. Since you have signed people up using an opt-in system, they are looking for your communications. The best subject line is a descriptor and it should remain constant throughout the life of that subscription.

Beware of email filters that exist on servers as they can screen out email completely, based on the wrong word or pattern in your subject line.



**How long should the emails be? How much information is too much in an email?**

This will vary as well but the best rule of thumb is the shorter, the better. People do not want to read 5-10 pages of information every week. However, they will read a 3-4 page article that contains useful information that cannot be condensed into a few paragraphs.



**What is the response rate for email campaigns?**

Assuming you are sending out messages to people who have opted-in, the response rates for email messages are very high. It is comparable to communications you mail to your best customer base. If you are considering "mass emailing", (or SPAMMING) then the answer would be quite low and this is a very risky strategy for your company.



**What tactics make the rate increase?**

Many of the same techniques that work in direct mail, work on the Internet: limited time offers, coupons, special pricing, timing, etc.



**How truly cost effective is it?**

Considering that email is essentially cost-free (if you use a software program like Majordomo), it is very cost-effective! And, even if you choose to go with a service that can provide you sophisticated features, such as database management, confirmations that the mail has been opened, back-end analysis, etc., email campaigns cost less per piece than sending communications through the post office. The trick is determining how you measure your goals and objectives.



**Should we use informal Internet" speech?**

Probably not. Informal symbols have been around a long time but are inappropriate for professional email communications. Here are a couple of common symbols used by friends and family:

;-) Smiley face winking

:-D Laughing

Internet speech also includes acronyms like:

IMHO In my humble opinion

BTW .....By the Way

Unless you are communicating with a hip teenager, or Internet nerd, its best to assume that your audience does not yet understand this language and might think your company odd for using it.



**What about printed direct mail pieces vs. web based marketing?**

Web-based marketing is just another channel to add to your marketing mix. Printed pieces will continue to perform well in the future as most K-12 schools are used to this type of promotion and print-based pieces still have many advantages over Internet-based information.

Web-based marketing is a way to reach people who are computer literate and prefer to research new products over the Internet as well as people who find the efficiency of the Internet compelling (ability to place orders on a 24/7 basis, complete and detailed information available about specific educational products, "instant" answers to questions). Web-based marketing is also a compelling way to attract new prospects in a low-cost manner.



**Do you have any specific information about teacher/librarian interest in email marketing for supplemental materials such as books?**

Of all the people within the K-12 community, librarians are the most information savvy searchers on the Internet. In fact, as librarians, they have been taught how to use electronic databases, so they are most receptive to using the Internet as a way to access and order information, including books. There are also quite a few "chat" boards set up for information sharing for librarians. While response will vary by offer, timing, and other promotional considerations, this is a market that is very receptive to communicating electronically.



**What are some good examples of successful e-mail/web marketing to the education market?**

### **Learning Network (Teacher Vision)**

<http://www.teachervision.com/lesson-plans/lesson-6398.html?s5>

This site offers a wide variety of free newsletters, appealing to every segment of the K-12 market.

### **Classroom Connect**

<http://www.classroom.com/community/email>

They scored a big coup when they got Gleason Sackmann! They also sponsor discussion lists in addition to newsletters.

### **Education World**

<http://www.education-world.com/maillist.shtml>

Good selection of newsletters and good explanation of what teachers are signing up for, but this site needs to collect better demographics about its subscribers. Also, this page needs a privacy statement link.



**Compared to direct mail and catalogs, how does web & email marketing measure up when it comes to influencing sales, and overall preference for receiving information from publishers?**

Web and email marketing are in its infancy while direct mail and catalogs have been around for centuries. At this point, direct mail and catalogs will out-pull email -- especially from a longevity standpoint. Printed promotions to the K-12 market can generate orders for years while email is "instant response" and "instant trash".



**Which segments are most likely to order online and be receptive to email?**

This is a two-part question. Ordering online for a K-12 school will be governed by many things. Will the school allow them to bypass the PO system? Will companies "accept" an electronic PO number? If payment is required upfront, will teachers feel comfortable giving out their credit card numbers over the Internet? Educational publishers are selling products over the Internet now and most companies are reporting a steady, month over month increase.

Receptivity to email by customer segment will vary by offer and company. The skill of the Internet Marketer will determine a company's experience.



**How can we use the Internet and email to effectively communicate with those educators who are not particularly savvy or excited about it?**

Don't try to sell a car to someone who doesn't drive. If your target market isn't "online", you can't market to them online.



**What is the best timing for email marketing?**

The timing for sending messages to the K-12 market is the same as direct mail -- except that you can control the exact day that the email is received. The best days for the K-12 market to receive email are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.



**What is the percentage of the education market that actually checks/has email?**

According to MDR's *Technology in Education 2001* report (<http://www.schooldata.com/reports.html> - tech), 83% of all schools indicate that 50% or more of their teachers have school-based email addresses.



**What percentage of the education market has access to the Internet?**

According to MDR's *Technology in Education 2001* report (<http://www.schooldata.com/reports.html> - tech), 92% of all schools are connected to the Internet. However, this varies by state with the high of 99% in Delaware and a low of 85% in the District of Columbia.



**How often do people check back to a site after visiting once?**

This is determined by the content and usefulness of the web site compared to the "need" of the visitor. For instance, as a substitute teacher in K-8, I have bookmarked 10 web sites that offer me content I can use when teaching. I re-visit them 3-4 times a month. Another site I visit even more than that is a "chat room" for substitutes where I can share my experiences and ask for help.

If increasing re-visits is a company goal, put yourself in the shoes of your target market and determine the 3 top reasons why a teacher/administrator should "bookmark" your site and visit it more than once a month. (HINT: If you give away nothing for free, chances are, they won't re-visit.)



**Do educational buyers prefer factual data about products or benefits of products in e-mail campaigns?**

If a company receives an email from a customer/prospect, requesting more information about a particular product, the sky's the limit. Actually, more is better in this case. Most of these inquiries are generated from people who have already visited your web site and not found what they were looking for. This is the time you can be as comprehensive as possible.

But DON'T attach anything.

If you have a PDF file of a brochure, etc, ASK before you send. Teachers/administrators are trained NOT to open attachments since this is the primary way viruses are transmitted to servers.



**What is the average response rate for e-mail blast of brand new educational products to the education market?**

Assuming an "email blast" is defined as an email campaign target to your house opt-in list, the answer to this question would rely on how refined the demographics of your list is prior to sending out the email. For instance, if your new product was a leveled reading program for grades K-3, and your opt-in email list was not identified by grade level, then your "announcement" could fall on many deaf ears. On the other hand, if your opt-in list consisted of customers who had purchased similar products in the past, then your response rates should be very high. Especially if you give them a free offer to respond to.



**Should the email contain the offer and sufficient information for the educator to make a decision and perhaps provide a web site link only for additional information?**

If you are sending an offer to a group of teachers/administrators who have asked you to do so, then you should include all the information needed for them to "act" on your email. They should be able to "act" by doing the following to place an order:

- 1) Reply to the email directly
- 2) Visit your web site and fill out the order form
- 3) Print the email or web site order form and mail or FAX it to you.
- 4) Call an 800 number and place the order.



**How would an email campaign that consisted of three or four or even more separate, short, but interesting email messages designed to intrigue, send over a week to two week period, with the offer made in the final email, be received? Would educators react to this as blatant manipulation and trash it, or hang in for the final installment?**

The good thing about email marketing is that you can test everything often and at no "cost". Because response rates (and reactions!) will change based on company, product and offer, there is no "right" way to develop a campaign unless you do it through trial and error.

Tests can be completed (and are pretty reliable) at a minimum quantity of 100. And, if something goes wrong, you've only alienated 100 people!

But remember Steven King's experience. Even though hundreds of thousands of people downloaded his first installment of his book, he found people lost interest as more time went by.

Email doesn't function well for building brands (advertising is the best medium for that). Email is all about building relationships — one at a time.



**Personalization. On balance, what's more important in a prospecting campaign? In a customer correspondence campaign?**

This is another question that be answered using our direct marketing skills. Personalization increases response. Period.



**Is there an easy way to compile email lists per school building/district if you know the formula for the email, eg. firstname.lastname@school.k12.ny.us?**

No. Every school and district is different. One district might use the full name, other, the first initial and last name. There are software packages you can purchase that will "mine" the Internet for email addresses — indeed, this is how those SPAMMERS get the "10 Million email addresses you can buy for only \$99.95!"

However, I would caution you about using this technique to gather email addresses. First of all, sending anything to addresses gathered in this manner is definitely SPAM. Secondly, we know sending unsolicited emails to people doesn't work and can only hurt your company's reputation. And thirdly, this type of promotion could hurt our industry long term.



**Are there software programs you would recommend if we wanted to own the application (not pay a yearly fee to a vendor)?**

There are hundreds of programs to choose from and I don't recommend any particular software because too much depends on your equipment and specific needs, but as a start, here are a few companies that offer software that can manage your email communications:

**Arial Software**

<http://www.arialsoftware.com/>

**Fairlogic Systems**

<http://www.fairlogic.com/>

**MailWorkz**

<http://www.mailworkz.com/>



**Developing loyal readers. What are the important considerations when designing an effective email series that serve to update current customers vis a vis to important corporate news and then ultimately serve to retain customers?**

A multifaceted question! Let me address the "Corporate News" issue first since it is something that I have strong feelings about. Somehow, most companies have this in mind when they invite web site visitors to "sign up" for something. And, I've seen cases where companies actually send press releases to teachers! In my mind, this is a case of unnecessary "information overload" and who cares, anyway?

Most customers do not give a hoot about your company. What do they care about? They care about what you can do for them lately. Can you save them money? Make their job easier? Help them obtain a personal gratification?

Developing loyal readers of your email communications will, in fact, help you attract new prospects and retain customers. Two things will happen if you have been successful:

- 1) A high percentage (50-60%) of your new subscriptions will come "recommended by a friend" instead of "web surfing".
- 2) Your "cancellation" rate is less than 1% of your total readership per issue.

Providing contemporary, quality, just-in-time, valuable information is the way to ensure loyal readership.



**Our group markets K-12 internet-delivered curriculum resources using the telephone to prospect and conduct live on-line demonstrations with potential buyers. How can we best use web-based marketing to complement this process?**

One idea is to provide online demos of your products and services. This enables web visitors to take a "tour" at their leisure — many times, for a teacher or administrator, this sometimes means at night or at home when your telemarketing staff is not working. You can offer them an incentive for "taking the tour" and as a by-product, ask for permission to contact them in the future.



**How do we implement effective Web marketing for k-12 ed tech events.**

Assuming you are talking about maximizing your presence at an educational convention, such as FETC, NECC, T&L, etc, if you have a list of customers/prospects who have asked to be notified of your exhibit plans and promotions, by all means, email them 2-3 months before and invite them to stop by your booth to get a "special free doodad" and bring a copy of the email message as proof. You can also send them reminders as the show gets closer. They will let you know when you've crossed the line!



**Are schools developing guidelines for managing unsolicited e-mail offers?**

Some districts have guidelines although I don't think there are any "survey" results that are projectable to the entire universe. Here is the Denver Public Schools' recommendations to their teachers as of February/March 2002:

**"Keep More than one Email Account.**

With the prevalence of junk email, the best strategy may be to keep a "public" web-based address. Set up a free, web-based email service (such as yahoo.com, mail.com, hotmail.com) and use it when you need to fill out a Web registration form. This information is often sold to advertisers mailing list, or online bulletin boards. This will keep your email account free from annoying, unsolicited mail.

**Viruses**

Please remember: DO NOT open any attachment that you haven't requested or aren't expecting. Just because an email comes from someone in DPS, don't open an attachment from someone whom you don't normally communicate. Also, you are certainly loved, but most folks in DPS won't send you a message indicating so. Jokes can be funny, but if you don't regularly get a joke from the sender, don't open it. If you open an attachment with a virus, it can damage your computer and perpetuate the virus among computers throughout DPS. Embarrassing (sic)."