

Email marketing campaigns
Save time and money;
Generate useful reports

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Not so long ago, lawyers and law firms relied on “snail mail” for delivery of the firm’s marketing communications – like invitations to events or printed newsletters or alerts.

Today, many savvy lawyers and law firms have turned to email for their marketing campaigns.

Traditional mail has its place, but it also has many drawbacks. Invitations take money to print, time to address and postage to mail. Once invitations are mailed, the sender has no idea how many were actually opened. If an invitation is opened, the recipient who wants to reply must take the extra step to do so via an RSVP card, a phone call or an email.

The same holds true for printed newsletters and alerts. It is a big investment of time and money to get articles written, approved, laid out, printed and mailed. All too often, news is sadly out of date by the time a print piece is received. Once again, law firms never know which publications get read -- and which are simply tossed into the circular file.

“Email marketing systems provide a cost-effective solution to many of the snail mail drawbacks,” said Matthew Parfitt. “An EMS features firm-approved templates, which can be quickly populated with newsworthy material – and sent out quickly. There is no cost for paper, print or postage – or for staff or mailing house time to execute the mailing.

“Best of all,” said Parfitt, “an EMS tracks each mailing and generates useful reports that let you know how many and which recipients are actually opening your emailed marketing materials.”

An excellent “open rate” for marketing emails on timely subjects sent to a carefully maintained list is about 30 percent. An EMS also lets you know which emails are undeliverable, to help you follow up and update your list, and which recipients opt-out of future email contact.

“In the case of invitations to events or webinars,” said Parfitt, “recipients can RSVP immediately via a link on the email. Invitations are just one part of a comprehensive event-planning module.

“In the case of newsletters,” said Parfitt, “the EMS not only lets you know if the email has been opened, it also lets you know which subjects and articles in the newsletter are most popular – so you can include more of the same in future communications.”

Parfitt led a panel discussion on “best practices” in electronic marketing systems at the monthly educational program of the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Legal Marketing Association (www.legalmarketing.org/rockymountain). The program was held March 8 at the downtown Denver offices of Patton Boggs (www.pattonboggs.com).

Parfitt is vice president for business development at Concep (www.conceptglobal.com), an international digital strategy agency with offices in London, Sydney and New York. Concep’s interactive email marketing system -- Concep Campaigner -- is used by more than 250 professional services firms, including 15 of the world’s 30 largest law firms.

Panelists included Kristin Alexander, special events coordinator at Sherman & Howard (www.shermanhoward.com); Greg Kalkwarf, sales and marketing leader for the Colorado office of BKD CPAs & Advisors (www.bkd.com); and Justin Knight, InterAction specialist at Holme Roberts & Owen (www.hro.com).

“Sixty-nine percent of businesses plan to increase their budgets for websites and social media in 2011,” said Parfitt. “Fifty-nine percent plan to spend more on email marketing. By comparison, only 15 percent intend to spend more on print. These businesses understand the future of marketing.” These statistics come from a recent MarketingSherpa B2B Marketing Benchmark Survey.

Alexander, Kalkwarf and Knight all vouched for the fact that email marketing had saved their firms a considerable amount of money. “In addition,” said Knight, “the switch from snail mail to email fits in well with a law firm’s green initiatives.”

EMS platforms integrate with a law firm’s website and CRM system. Directing email usage to the website -- linking to article content, event and webinar registration, and survey forms, for example -- allows email success rates to be tracked through the website’s tracking control panel.

Websites should also include a “preference manager” page – where visitors can choose which (if any) email communications they want to receive from a lawyer or law firm.

Registrations and preferences are in turn shared with the firm’s CRM system, where contact data resides and from which mailing lists are derived. The CRM system can notify individual lawyers or marketers each time someone among their contacts registers for an event or webinar, or subscribes (or unsubscribes) to a newsletter or alert.

Additional email marketing campaign best practices include:

- Pre-designed templates within the EMS guarantee that all communications will offer a consistent brand experience – and that important information always appears “above the fold” where it is most likely to be seen and read.
- Images are attractive but often are blocked by webmail services. Be sure to balance images with text – so that there is something compelling to read even when all of the images are blocked. Add alt-tags to every image.
- Use your marketing emails to drive traffic to your website, where actions can be tracked. In a newsletter, for example, easily scan-able links “above the fold” can take the reader to a teaser – with a further link that takes the reader to the article content on your website.
- EMS offers a range of formats that meet the needs and preferences of different users – HTML, MIME, a link to the web-hosted version, a link to a print/mobile version, and an attached PDF version (for printing out by those who prefer this option) -- of the email campaign.
- To thwart phishing and spoofing schemes, establish a dedicated domain for marketing messages so that they are kept separate from regular email communications. As an added benefit, if someone reports your email as spam, your firm’s entire email operation is not shut down.
- The “to” line in each email should include the recipients first and last name. Via a mail merge, the introduction should be personalized with a “Dear Mr. Green” or “Dear Anthony.”
- Many EMS applications allow the “from” name in an email to be merged from the CRM or database, meaning that each recipient can receive the email from his or her specific contact within the law firm (which significantly improves “open” and “response” rates).
- In order to maximize open/view rates, subject lines in an email campaign should be written to reflect the content of the email and also grab attention.
- EMS applications allow users to segment data and send specific follow-up email campaigns. Those who have clicked on links can receive one follow up, whereas those who have not interacted within a certain amount of time can receive a special offer in order to get them to re-engage.
- Email recipients must always be able to opt-out or unsubscribe from a communication – or from all communications from your law firm. EMS applications ensure that these emails can never inadvertently be added back.

- An email marketing piece should never be more than two or three screens deep. Links to “read more” can take the recipient to a website to read additional content – where more specific interests can be tracked.
- Always comply with CAN-SPAM and EU data protection rules.

Carefully crafted email marketing campaigns can save lawyers and law firms a significant amount of time and money. In addition, they generate a wide range of useful reports that can be used to refine the firm’s marketing efforts going forward.