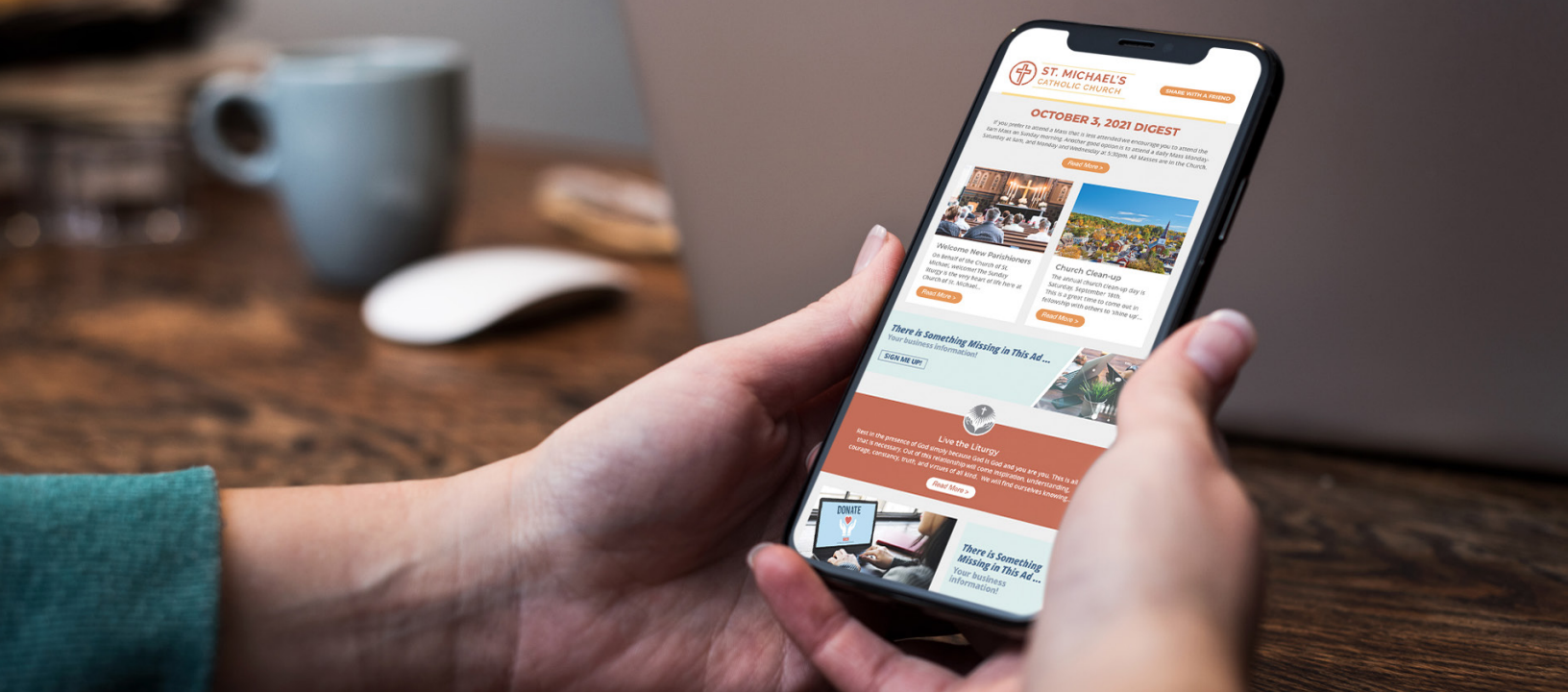


7 STEPS

TO BETTER PARISH EMAILS





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You have some email addresses, you know that email messaging is important for your parish ... now what? Knowing where to begin with email marketing can seem daunting, especially when facing the unknown world of list management and scheduling.

Fret not! Here are seven email marketing best practices that will help you build a strong email marketing strategy. With a strong strategy in place, you can streamline your process and communicate with your digital audience effectively.

1. BUILD AND MAINTAIN AN EMAIL LIST

The first step to a successful campaign is to assess your email list.

Maybe there is not currently an email list in place for your community, which means the task of list creation falls on you. While starting from scratch might seem daunting, your ability to oversee who is being added and what lists are being created will allow you to sort people in the most effective way possible. Consider your audience and how you want to communicate with them, and then build lists around your messaging.

For example: maybe you have an engaged young adult group, a list of all the altar servers' parents, and the contacts for the women who decorate the church for the holidays. If all of those "audiences" are in a single list and you're emailing every message to every recipient, well, your young adults are going to get frustrated when they're emailed the monthly altar server

schedule. Breaking your interested parties out by list will ensure more engaged readers.

Consider a strategy to keep the contact information updated. Maybe you email once a year to confirm that email addresses are still accurate and that folks are in proper email lists.

2. WRITE A STRONG SUBJECT LINE

Your subject line must be strong, attention-grabbing, and informative. Your email recipient will see the subject line first, and a solid subject line can determine if your email will be opened or not, regardless of the great content you've written inside.

A good subject line should contain between 30 and 50 characters, including spaces. Any longer and email providers often truncate the extra words. Your email subject line should also create a sense of relevance while giving readers some indication of what to expect once they open the email.

For help with subject lines, check out: *50 of the Best Church Subject Lines You Aren't Using*: <https://4lpi.com/blog/the-best-church-subject-lines-you-arent-using/>

3. CUSTOMIZE YOUR PRE-HEADER

Just like the subject line, your email recipient will see the pre-header without opening the email, a small preview of what's inside. Think of the subject line as a menu item and the pre-header as the small line of description, explaining what comes next. Your pre-header can determine the click-through rate of your email. Writing a succinct, helpful pre-header will aid your recipients by alerting them and helping them understand that the message inside is relevant to them.

4. PERSONALIZE THE GREETING LINE

Subject lines and pre-headers aren't the only customizable feature available to you! Personalizing the greeting of your emails with your contacts' first names grabs the attention of each reader right away.

Don't worry, personalizing an email's greeting line with 50 recipients' names doesn't mean you'll have to manually write and send 50 different emails every time you want to send a message. Many email marketing tools today allow you to configure the greeting of your email campaign so that your message automatically sends with the name of the people on your contact list — so everyone is getting a personal version of the same message.

5. WATCH YOUR WIDTH

Keep in mind that many people check their emails on their phones vs. on a desktop computer, your layout should follow suit — around 500 to 650 pixels wide.

If your email template is wider than 650 pixels, your email won't show up correctly on your recipient's phone screen and will require users to scroll horizontally to read the full content. No thanks! That kind of clunky design will likely affect your open rates.

Having your template fit within the standard format will make for easier readability, better conversions, and an overall better user

experience. Most email programs understand this and are built to accommodate emails accessed by phone.

6. CONSIDER THE “FOLD”

“Above the fold” refers to the information that's visible to the reader when they first open the email and before they scroll down, it's important to make your main message and call-to-action a focal point by placing them above that scroll-action.

Even though recent research suggests that consumers scroll more than they used to — thanks to social media and vertical timelines — above the fold content still gets the most attention from readers.

All of this matters for your conversion rate. What's a “conversion rate?” It's the percentage of readers who complete your call-to-action. If you instruct your readers to “call the office” or “donate food” or “reply,” you want a high conversion rate of involved readers completing that action. Place your message and call-to-action above the fold to increase your conversion rate and engage your audience.

Eye tracking research from Nielsen Norman Group found that consumers spend 57% of their viewing time on above-the-fold content. That number drastically goes down to 17% of the second screenful and gradually decreases as they scroll.



7. TEST YOUR EMAIL

Get some quick input by conducting a five-second test — send a copy of the email to a friend or business associate. Ask:

- Do the subject and message seem engaging?
- Can they quickly find your call-to-action?
- Do the images display at the proper size?

If so, great work! If not, take a few minutes to make necessary improvements.

Email is a communication method used by most Americans, and most people are checking email every day. Don't overlook email in your parish communications strategy. With some effort, your diligence will lead to digital success!



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