

The Hamilton House guide to making a profit from emailing schools

Hamilton House has devised what is probably the most accurate schools email list on the market today. In the past year we've seen a number of highly successful campaigns undertaken using the list.

However, not every company that has used the email list has had success. As a result we have been able to study both the successes and failures of the past year to derive information which will help you to ensure your campaign is as profitable as you wish it to be. (If you don't want to read all three pages there is a summary at the end.)

1. Does it have to be email?

Some companies choose 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.

2. How will the teacher get more information, and get in touch?

All successful email campaigns are complete in their advertisement of the product (allowing people to choose to buy just from that information) but also give the option of leading the reader to a web page that is directly relevant to the promotion. Thus, if selling a book, the email sells the benefits of the book, and the web page carries more information on the contents. If selling a computer system the email covers the benefits, the web page covers the features. If selling a course the email gives the benefits you get from attending, and the web page contains the prospectus. Sending the teacher to a general page and expecting the teacher to click through to the right page does not work. If the page to which you want to send people has a long and complicated URL you should shorten this in the advert because some teachers will be reading a printout of your email and will not be able to click directly through to your 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. Again, many teachers won't be able to go onto your website at work because they don't have internet access – which is why the other forms of communication are important.

3. To whom are you promoting?

Promotions to the school administrator, bursar, head, deputy head, head of sixth form, head of IT and head of careers tend to work best, because these people tend to have internet connection at work. Promotions to other subject and year heads work far less well. Trying to sell products to (for example) the head of maths in a secondary school or the KS1 co-ordinator in primary schools is very hard, and email may not be the right approach. Don't try to get around this by emailing the head in the hope that he or she will pass the item on – it doesn't happen. However we have seen one case where an email to the administrator asking for the page (which was relevant to many staff) to be printed out and put on the staff notice board has worked – but we are awaiting more evidence of this approach.

4. The subject line

Use the subject line to say who your email is for (as in Attn: The Headteacher). Don't use the subject line to introduce the email or to insert a catchy title – it doesn't work. The only exception is if you are mailing the administrator (but don't try to get round it by asking the administrator personally to pass the message on). 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.

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 either stress a benefit or ask an interesting question. If asking a question always use an open question – not one that can be answered yes or no.

6. The text

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 headings (and then only use one colour), and do write in perfect English. **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.

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.

8. Response rate

Get all this right, and for the prime list of teachers (head, deputy, administrator, etc) you can get up to 7% for a totally free item that is really

seen as beneficial (that means it is really free, not a free introduction). For a product costing about £15 or £20 you might get 0.5%. We have got up to 1.2% but that was very unusual. For a mailing to other teachers you might get 0.2% or a little more. Selling a course to administrators we have got 0.2% in terms of phone enquiries with the same amount going to the website.

9. How to choose email, solo or shared

Look at the response rates that we have indicated, and find the one that closest meets your situation. Let's say you are mailing the Head of Careers with some books for sale – so that might be 0.5%. On 5000 schools that means 25 replies maximum. But remember, that was with an advert written by a couple of people who spent half a day (yes half a day) composing the advert, and who devote most of their working time to working on adverts. Likewise, the website that backed the advert up was proven (getting over 1000 hits a day). So, if you don't have that experience, or if your website is new and you are not bringing in a professional, you might expect to get fewer orders. Let's say 15 sales.

Thus a mailing to 5000 schools will cost you £260, and you will get 15 sales. If that is profitable, fine. If not, and you need 25 sales, you might like to experiment, but be prepared for it to fail. If you do fail take a look at shared mailings.

A shared mailing to the same schools might cost you around £400 or £450 including printing – it depends on what you send and what sort of discount you get for the mailing. Advertising the same range of products, again to 5000 schools, might get you 40 sales – we've had sales levels of 100 products costing £25 each from a single page in a shared mailing. Here there is no need for a website – one goes for a straight sale off the page. So, you spend more on the advert, less on the website, get a higher return rate, and make a profit.

10. Summary

To make email work you need to be selling to people who are most likely to have an internet connection on their desk, you need to be good at writing persuasive text without design and pictures, and you need to have a link to a web page designed for this advert. If your advertisement falls outside any of these parameters you might still make it, but you must accept that the medium could be against you and that shared mailing could be a more effective medium.

For more information please call 01536 399 000. If you wish you can send your proposed email advertisement to Sales@hamilton-house.com and we'll call you back with our thoughts. We'll also take a look at your website if you wish. We'll make our recommendation at the end – no charge and no obligation.

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