MASS EMAIL: BEST (AND WORST) PRACTICES – AND HOW TO FILTER OUT THE BAD AND THE UGLY AND KEEP THE GOOD

Everyone receives too much email. At the same time, we all want to receive information that is important to us.

Mass email is mail sent out to a group – typically hundreds of people – using a distribution list or a listserv. The temptation is always to send out mail to the largest group available. Unfortunately, when recipients receive mail they consider "spam", they become resentful. Some users go as far as never looking at any email not directly sent to them.

To keep mass email effective, it has to become more ***targeted*** – meaning, the majority of recipients should potentially be interested in the content. Following are some tips on how to send more targeted mass emails.

And if you are the recipient of unwanted mass email, there is also some information on how to filter unwanted or low-priority email away from the inbox.

A. Sending Targeted Mass Email

1. Match Your List to Your Intended Audience and Message.

Department/Division

If your target readership is primarily your division/department, your manager likely will have access to an email list that will cover most of the people you need to reach.

School

There are a number of lists accessible via Outlook that might address your target audience, alone or in combination. When you access your Address Book in Outlook and type "SOM", you will see a long list of distribution lists. If you see one that you think will match your target audience, right-click on the name to see the list's properties, including the members, to verify that this is indeed the list or one of the lists you want to use.

The School also maintains a number of lists via a custom tool called iList. Some of these lists can be accessed on the intranet – see https://www.intranet.medschool.ucsf.edu/ilist/

Staff within the Dean's Office units who have iList installed on their computers can also use this tool to access a number of custom lists and to create their own. Please contact ISU for further details.

Campus

To reach a cross-campus audience, check the listservs available via OAAIS. http://oaais.ucsf.edu/OAAIS/service_catalog/16-DSY/g2/27-DSY.html

The listserv help page also includes instructions on how to create your own listserv. http://oaais.ucsf.edu/OAAIS/service_catalog/16-DSY.html

Don'ts & Do's

- **Do not** use schoolwide / campuswide mass email lists, unless you know for sure your message will be of interest to a very large and broad group of recipients. **Overusing these lists dilutes their effectiveness**. Senders who repeatedly send out their messages to an audience that does not wish to receive it tend to get filtered out (see below.)
- **Do not** send out reminders, if you can avoid it. One email per topic is almost always sufficient.
- **Do** proofread your message carefully and have it reviewed by the appropriate authority before sending it out. A second message with corrections looks unprofessional and is a nuisance to the recipient.
- **Avoid attachments** (see below)

2. Format of Targeted Mass Email

Sender and subject line should match your content.

a. **The sender** should be a person or an email address associated with the content of the email.

Example: Mass emails regarding the Clinical & Translational Institute (CTSI) at UCSF are typically sent out from CTSI@ucsf.edu. A typical subject line might read: "CTSI presents: First-ever Clinical/Translational Research Symposium for Residents."

When sender, subject line and content match, the recipient is then able to identify and manage the email at a glance.

b. **Subject lines** should be specific and summarize the content of the email:

Effective subject line:
"Apply for Bridge funding – deadline August 15"

Unclear subject line:
"Only 2 weeks left to submit"

c. **The content** of the email should be a short, concise summary listing the main points of your message in one or two paragraphs **with a link to your website and/or the campus calendar** for any further details, flyers, images, pdfs, forms, presentations, etc.

Do not send attachments with mass email! Attachments, especially large ones, clog up email boxes, and *any* attachments are cumbersome to access via remote locations/mobile phones/Blackberries.

Avoid use of images (unless they are essential), decorative elements ("stationery"), multiple fonts/colors/styles, and odd formatting.

B. Filtering Incoming Email: Later – or Never

1. Emails You May Want to Read Later

If you regularly receive emails from a specific sender/organization that are neither urgent nor important and which clutter up your inbox, filter them directly into a separate folder. This way, you can look at them later or just delete them, without having to completely block the sender.

How: Create a new folder in your inbox for these messages. Right click on the message in your inbox, choose "create rule", and check the boxes for the conditions that apply (i.e. move incoming messages from this sender into this folder.)

Contact your desktop support if you need help with implementing rules. Campus HR also offers training classes on Outlook, including effective inbox management. See http://training.ucsf.edu/

2. Emails You Never Want To Read

If you regularly receive emails from a sender you consider a spammer, and you are absolutely sure you never want to read any of these mails (and you have not been able to "unsubscribe" from the person's/organization's list), you can right-click on the email, choose "junk e-mail" and then "add sender to blocked senders list". This will filter future messages from that sender directly into the junk email folder.

Outlook has a built-in spam filter (found under "Junk E-mail Options) that you can set at "High" for maximum filtering of outside spam. However, be sure to check your Junk E-mail Folder periodically, because the filter has been know to divert completely legitimate email!

OAAIS as well as the SOM ISU Services have also implemented spam filters – again, please make sure to occasionally check those filters. The spam definitions change frequently, and sometimes legitimate email gets trapped in those filters.

A Note About Campus Listserv Membership:
Some campus listservs, such as the DEAN-MED list (school faculty) or the ALLACAD list (all faculty and academics) are generated automatically, based on your payroll classification. **You cannot subscribe or unsubscribe to these lists** – by virtue of working here in a certain capacity, you are subscribed.

You are free to filter messages sent via these lists, but we strongly advise you not to filter **all** messages sent to these lists into junk mail. The chancellor and school leadership use these listservs to disseminate messages, including very important ones that you might not want to miss.