

Improve Chapter Email Engagement With Behavioral Science: A Primer From Nancy Harhut



Email remains one of the most effective marketing channels for association chapters. There are countless benefits of sending emails to your members, member guests and other audiences, including:

- Direct access to the “right” audiences
- High return for minimal investment
- Easy space for promotion
- Ownership and control over what’s sent and when
- Trackability and optimization

At the same time email delivers these benefits and others, using it to connect with your chapter audiences can be tricky.

People continue to be overwhelmed by the number of emails they get daily. Some emails are the ones they want to read, while others go right into the Trash without ever being opened.

Knowing your chapter emails need to be the ones they open and react to, how can you increase the likelihood your emails will have the desired effect?

Several StarChapter clients have mentioned a recent presentation by Nancy Harhut, co-founder and

chief creative officer at HBT Marketing as helping with their chapter email engagement. (Nancy is the author of *Using Behavioral Science in Marketing*.)

In her presentation, she offers seven strategies for creating emails that give readers more of the reasons they need to open and respond. Here we share those strategies, which use behavioral science to improve open and response rates. We also provide ideas for applying the concepts to your chapter's email strategy.

7 new ways to increase chapter email open and click throughs

- 1. Use emotion to connect with customers and prospects.** People engage better with emotional language, which taps into feelings like pride, belonging, curiosity, urgency and inspiration. Incorporate emotions into your subject lines and continue that in the body of the email. Want more people at your next monthly meeting? Try a subject line like "We saved you a seat. Come join the conversation." Then, in the body, include quotes or videos from those who've attended previous meetings describing how attending chapter monthly meetings has helped them personally and/or professionally.
- 2. Enhance cognitive fluidity.** Our brains prefer simple, easy-to-process information; avoid complex content and jargon where you can. Replace it with content that uses techniques like alliteration, repetition and rhyme to deliver content that's clear as well as memorable. Use fun, engaging subject lines, like "Meet, mingle and make memories at our monthly meetup." And follow a punchy subject line with copy that uses shorter, bulleted phrases and/or short sentences and paragraphs, instead of long paragraphs of narrative copy.
- 3. Leverage input bias.** The more effort a reader thinks went into something, the more value they place on it. Use that to your advantage and highlight the work that went into what you're emailing them about. Reaching out to membership about the new member toolkit you just uploaded to your website? Use a subject line like "Thanks to your hard work, here's our new member toolkit!" and body copy like "After months of planning and work from volunteers on our membership committee and from across the chapter, we're excited to unveil our comprehensive member toolkit." (And don't forget to link to it!)
- 4. Create a group that will favor your product.** When copy sounds exclusive, readers think you're speaking directly to them. Start by personalizing the subject line and the body copy with



the reader's name. Try a subject line like "Joe, join the 150 members already registered for our annual conference." In the body copy, where you discuss the conference and the benefits of attending, include quotes from members who have come to previous conferences. Your content should reinforce the high value of the conference and use language that encourages this person to join. Share statistics indicating the number of members who have already registered. The reader may get the sense that they'll be left out if they don't go.

5. Get people to see things in a different way. To make the content more relevant to the person you're talking to, frame messages in interesting ways and use language that empowers. Let's say you want members to attend your new Speed Mentoring program. Many members will picture a traditional mentorship program, which can, for some, seem like a lot of work. Use language that shows how easy, fun and relevant it can be, and you'll eliminate the stress for many. Try a subject line like "Find your mentor in just 3 minutes," or "Nancy, your resume is the talk of the town!" In the copy, show them how the event is relevant to them and how attending can help advance their careers and make connections without much pre-work.

6. Express deadlines as durations rather than specific dates. Periods of time are easier for individuals to process than dates. Have something with a deadline? Using a duration (e.g., in 3 days) in your email rather than a date (e.g., by May 25) can reduce the mental effort a person needs to interpret the deadline, leading to quicker responses and increased engagement. For example, the "Early bird pricing for our conference ends in 3 days" subject line will be more compelling to readers than "Early bird pricing for our conference ends on May 25."

7. Use fresh starts to motivate behavior. People are more inclined to pursue goals and make changes based on a temporal landmarks, which are moments that signify new beginnings. These are things like the start of a month, year, season or personal milestones like birthdays. Want August to be the month you get members excited for the programming in your upcoming chapter year? Consider a subject line like "Be off and running — check out our upcoming chapter programming," or "A new chapter year brings new opportunities. Have you seen our new resources?"

Integrating some of these behavioral science-backed strategies into your email campaigns can be easily. The shift in language can lead to enhanced member engagement and increased participation and it can ultimately improve the effectiveness of all your chapter communications.

