

Guidelines for Non Profits Meetings & Events Email Invitations



We all strive to communicate effectively our messages, still most organizations struggle with getting people to register for events. They wonder "how often?" or "will they get annoyed if it's too often?"

You can follow one of two common models for sending invitations: The long cycle and the short cycle.

1. **Long cycle:** Send multiple invitations over a long period of time (two to six weeks).
2. **Short cycle:** Send one or two invitations within a brief period of time (two to seven days).

Both work for different purposes. Below are some recommendations based on experience in sending and receiving both of these types of invitations.

The Long Cycle

Multiple invitations sent over a long period of time are fitting for:

- Educational sessions;
- Large/Long sessions (more than 150 people/60 minutes);
- Sessions tied to live events (seminars at trade shows);
- A series of sessions that should be attended in total and in succession.

People generally need to plan further in advance for these types of sessions, so more notice is appropriate.

A typical long email-marketing cycle looks like:

- Email 1:
4 to 6 weeks in advance. This can be a "save the date" notice with a teaser announcement in the subject line and a request to save the date and time. An Early bird rate offer may be appropriate now.
- Email 2:
3-4 weeks in advance. This should be a full content invitation, including a description of what the participant should expect to learn, gain, find out, or experience. The key to success is listing the benefit to the reader first and the tactical information last, in other words: "What's in it for me?"
- Email 3:
2-3 weeks in advance. You may want to increase the urgency for response with some push to action, such as "Limited seats remaining!" or "Only 2 weeks left to register!"
- Email 4:
1 week in advance. Include a "Last chance to register" notice in this email. Remember to stress "what's in it for them?"

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- Email 5:
Day before or day of event. This is simply a reminder to those who have already registered, not to the rest of the database. It reminds them of the event and contains their login instructions, along with links to any handout materials or other information they may need.

Short Cycle

A few invitations contained within a two-to-seven-day period are appropriate when your company or organization provides informational/educational webinars such as:

- Networking, informal, no formal educational credits or certifications.
- Speak on singular topics.
- Short group sessions of 60 minutes or less.
- Lunch & Learn sessions.

A typical short email-marketing cycle looks like:

- Email 1: Two to five business days before event. Include "Webinar: [name of event]" in your subject line or some similar content that alerts the reader that this is a webinar that needs to be registered for. Include all pertinent information, leading with the benefit or problem the session will solve or address.
- Email 2: Day of the event. This is a reminder of the event name, date, time, and login instructions.

Many people respond well to the short-cycle style of invitation because it's either in their window of time and need or it isn't. So, short-cycle audiences tend to have a high level of interest, even though your attendance numbers may be smaller. Some short-cycle emails have been sent as briefly as the same day, but this is not recommended unless you intentionally want a very small response.

Best time to Send an email invitation?

One of the most common questions non-profit organizations ask us is, "When is the best time to send email?" The hard truth: "It depends".

Your optimal send time depends on a lot of factors, such as your industry, demographics and the nature of your message.

"It depends" is not the most satisfying answer, of course. But the fact remains that there is no universal "best" time or day to send email. What works best for a Professional Non-Profit Organization may not work at all for a Trade Association.

Testing -- and re-testing -- time of day and day of week is a must to determine your organization's optimal send time.

What we know from research and people's behavior with emails is this:

- First thing in the morning, people have their forefinger positioned on the trigger, ready to click on delete in a rapid motion all the junk in their inbox. Not a good choice.

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- Mondays, especially in the morning, is often busy with meetings and catching from last week's issues, usually not a good choice either.
- Friday afternoon is mostly spent figuring out the weekend's fun activities, avoid Friday afternoon.
- Lunch time or early afternoon may be the best time as people tend to be more relaxed.
- Weekend may be an option for your demographics, test it and see if it works
- Try different days and time to measure the effectiveness with actual registration and click through rates. You may be surprised by the results.



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