

ELECTRONIC MESSAGING BEST PRACTICES (MOBILE APPS; TEXT; EMAIL)

MOBILE APPS

With smartphones prevalent and integrated into every aspect of life ----- mobile is where people are today. Whether you are looking to simply provide information or create inspiration ---- having a mobile app to connect, inspire, evangelize and converse has become a necessary component of church communication. The following best practices can assist you with getting the most out of your mobile platform.

STRATEGIES

HOW TO GET STARTED WITH A MOBILE APP

1. Select a company that specializes in communications ([MyParishApp by Diocesan Publications](#) and [Catholic Parish App by Our Sunday Visitor](#) are two of the most common) or contact the [Parish Stewardship Office](#) for more information on mobile apps.
2. Once you have selected a vendor, they will assist you in the process of designing YOUR PARISH mobile app. We recommend designing the app so that it visually ties into your other communication platforms (website, bulletin, social media, etc.).
3. Initiate the app by promoting a “Download” Sunday at the parish. This can be done by having the pastor ask at the end of mass if the parish would turn on their cell phones and download the app now. We recommend you schedule a “**Download Sunday**” at least twice a year.
4. Use your website, bulletin, social media, email, and pulpit to advertise your app. You can also use promo cards or banners in your narthex to help you drive more downloads

MANAGING YOUR MOBILE APP

1. A Parish Staff member should be the main person responsible for ensuring the app and content is relevant and timely (they can be assisted by other staff or volunteers to discuss content).
2. Set a specific time each week (30 minutes max) to discuss the messages and/or content you wish to send out the following week. Once the content has been determined, the app can be programmed to send at a specific date and time for the following week.
3. Use “Push” notifications. Use this powerful tool as fully and effectively as possible as they remind users to continually return to an app ---which keeps it top of mind and strengthens relationships.
4. Send 2 – 3 messages (with “push” notification) per week. These give you the power to engage parishioners, reach lapsing users and deliver urgent messages.
5. Send “Push” messages during the week --- and avoid weekends. Afternoons have the highest click rate.

MOBILE APP CONTENT AND TIPS

1. Keep messages short. Your message is received on the amount of the words that appear on the lock screen (smartphones vary). Enter 10 or fewer words then include a return. Those 10 words should be clear, concise and compact. Ask yourself: why should the user open this message? The answer is what you need to highlight in the first sentence.
2. Make the message personal. It's ok to use humor. And statements perform twice as well as those that ask a question. So tell them; don't ask!
3. As with other forms of communication (bulletin, websites, etc.), balance your message so it is not all information. Keep the ratio of Information vs Inspiration closer to 1:1
4. Balancing your 2 – 3 push messages as follows: **1st message of the week:** Send information on what is happening this week at your parish (or include link to your parish website calendar); **2nd message of the week:** Send inspirational content (link to a short video, quote, link to an interesting article or story, etc.); **3rd message of the week:** “Onboarding” messages – those that help new users engage the app (messages that help them through the ins-and-outs of the app).
5. Use cross linking (links built into the message to reference your website, social media or another site with similar content).
6. Avoid misdating your message. When you use the word “today”, some people may not read your message until a day or two later.
7. Timely notifications and active use of message are critical.

Keep your parishioners informed and updated. A good reason to update your app with valuable content is to keep current subscribers updated AND provide necessary information for new visitors to convert to return users.

TEXTING

The most important rule to remember is that you may only send “marketing” messages to recipients who have explicitly opted in to receive these messages. Why? The primary reason for this is the stringent anti-spam laws that govern these “marketing” strategies. Because texting is more personal, it should be used sparingly (if it all) with your parishioners. It may be convenient but email, mobile app or social media is almost always a better form of communication. If you choose to use texting as one of your communication channels, a few things to keep in mind:

1. Restrict your characters to 160. Mobile networks typically break the text into smaller chunks of 160 characters each. Which means the message can be broken into multiple parts. As a result, your recipient may either fail to receive these messages altogether, or messages may sometimes get delivered out of order.
2. Timing is everything. The nature of texting is such that the recipients open their messages instantly upon receiving them. What is your immediate need - Prayers? Weather? Volunteers?
3. Call to Action: One of the best and easiest ways to do this is by including a phone number or URL at the end of your message. While this may not be the most ideal call for action, it is still important to enable your recipient to check out further information related to your message.

E M A I L

Using email (this is bulk email – not everyday business email) to communicate with your parishioners will save money, time, and paper. It will also allow you to communicate with them more effectively and immediately. It also benefits the parishioners, giving them the ability to respond and communicate with the parish more effectively and on a one-to-one basis.

STRATEGIES

EMAIL CONTENT AND DESIGN TIPS

- Focus your message and be concise. Email is often scanned, not read thoroughly and you only have a few seconds to grab the reader's attention. Your design, language, and messaging should reflect this reality.
- Make it quick. Most of us give less than 15 seconds of our attention to an email.
- Stay on topic – avoid mixing many different items in 1 email.
- Remember – like an app, it doesn't always have to be informational. Keep in mind the balance of Information vs Inspiration (closer to 1:1 ratio).
- Give the email a title and make it descriptive. Use a short focused subject line such as 'Parish Picnic this Sunday' or 'Friday Lenten Supper' will help increase open rates.
- Avoid words in subject line that might push the message to a Spam folder. Words such as: All New, Congratulations, Now, Urgent, etc. may cause it to be received as junk.
- Format to visually fit the screen. **Standardize 'same subject' emails** so there is a consistent look. For example: If you are sending out a monthly update on parish stewardship giving, keep the format of the body of the email the same, use the same subject line and fill in the updated information.
- If your email is all text, break the information up into short paragraphs. The font should be clear and legible and no smaller than 12 point size. If you do need to send a longer email, use slightly larger and bold font to help the reader skim and still have a good idea of the content.
- If you are using graphics (like a simple flyer that might be more aesthetically pleasing) try embedding your message into the body of the screen instead of attaching a PDF flyer. The more you can eliminate a 'mouse click', the greater the chance of your message being scanned. If more information is needed, you can always include a link. Don't over create the design!
- If you want to direct people to a specific action -- use buttons or linked text (examples: registration form, donate, document, more information, etc). See example in the next bullet.
- Use email for current events in the form of an e-newsletter/update – [SEE EXAMPLE](#)
- It's okay to ask for a reply or feedback. Email is a platform for two-way communication.
- Use cross linking (links built into the message to reference your mobile app, social media or another site with similar content).
- Say thanks! You don't have to dedicate an entire email to it but you can build gratitude into every email you send.

EMAIL CONTENT SUMMARIZED:

Keep it short -- Be consistent -- Be relevant -- Be personal -- Say thank you

EMAIL ADDRESS COLLECTION AND DISTRIBUTION

STRATEGIES:

HOW TO COLLECT ADDRESSES

1. On registration forms (parish, religious education, and youth ministry programs)
2. Email drive from the pew – cards available to fill out in pew
3. Email collection table in narthex (*part of “email collection Sunday”)
4. Email drive using smart phones
5. Feature a sign-up form on your website. State what they'll get for signing up, e.g., bulletins, newsletter, event notifications, contests, etc. The shorter the form, the better. (Just name and email address for example.)
6. On stewardship campaign forms
7. Bulletin announcement to subscribe to parish email list
8. Parish-Wide events – have an iPad or similar device for parishioners to enter directly
9. Collaboration with school if applicable

We recommend you schedule an **“Email Collection Sunday”** at least twice a year

HOW TO ENTER ADDRESSES INTO YOUR DATABASE

One by one as you get them in to initially build the database of addresses

- PDS (Parish Data Systems) users – add to family screen. To see how, click [here](#)
- PDS Connect: parishioners can enter and edit their own information. This is a “hosted” service thru PDS. Please contact Bryan Gummersall (bryan@ptechs.com) for details and costs to use this option.

HOW TO MAINTAIN THE ADDRESSES

1. Cards in pews requesting updated email addresses
2. Include an area on publications that go out by mail or email asking for updated email address
3. Include a link on your website for updating email addresses
4. If you get emailed returned – contact parishioner to get updated email address
5. Annually review your registrations for religious ed. and youth ministry to update parent email contact
6. Twice a year parish event to collect and update emails

HOW TO SET UP A PARISH-WIDE DISTRIBUTION LIST

1. PDS (Parish Data Systems) Users– can be interfaced with Constant Contact. Click [here](#) to see how.
2. www.constantcontact.com - email marketing, events, campaigns, surveys
3. www.FlockNote.com - simple email system – good use for small parishes
4. www.myemma.com – email marketing, over 100 templates
5. Outlook – good use for very small parishes

HOW TO USE EMAIL ADDRESSES ONCE YOU HAVE THEM

- a) To announce upcoming parish events
- b) Reminders of special events/programs (food bank, giving tree, guest speaker, etc)
- c) Special Mass schedules i.e., Lent, Advent
- d) Funeral Masses
- e) Parish newsletter/bulletin
- f) Quarterly Giving statements (PDS gives you the option to email or print & mail)
- g) Fundraising follow-up (ACA and Parish Stewardship)
- h) Moments of grace – impact of parish and community (food bank, mission trips, sister parishes, etc)
- i) Prayer requests
- j) Tax statements (PDS gives you the option to email or print & mail)
- k) Surveys
- l) Event sign ups
- m) Inspirational messages, links or short video
- n) Weather advisories (Mass or parish event cancellations, etc)
- o) To specific groups/ministries for information/schedules. See section on parish-wide distribution lists.

FREQUENCY OF EMAILS

Weekly at most; monthly at least – depending on the goal and purpose needing to be accomplished (don't send too often so that it becomes an annoyance)

CONSENT

Include an opt-out as consent is crucial

- a) If a parishioner provides you with their email address, whether on a registration form or program sign up, it is acceptable to assume that in doing so they've given you permission to use their email as a form of communication. Keep in mind they may choose to opt out in the future.
- b) By law, one is not permitted to send mass emails to individuals who have "opted out". However, one may still send personal email to the account. Keep in mind a parishioner may also request to opt out of personal emails (or all emails all together), in which case their wishes must be respected.
- c) If you use a product such as Constant Contact, an opt-out feature is built in.

EMAIL LIMITS

Some email products have limits to the number of emails that can be sent per hour and/or may have a limit to how many email addresses you can email at one time. You may need to stagger the time of emails being sent in a given day and/or you may need to limit the number of email addresses in a distribution list, thus needing to create multiple distribution lists. Check with your email provider first.

If you are using the PDS database to distribute your email, please contact Bryan Gummersall for further information at bryan@ptechs.com