

How Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Worldwide’s Email Communication to Prospective Students Stacks-Up to Industry Performance

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For many years, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Worldwide’s Marketing Department has been tracking and recording data associated with its email communication with prospective students. To ensure the email program’s health, the results of these efforts are regularly compared to industry reported benchmarks. This whitepaper will address unique open rates, click-through rates, message size, unsubscribe rates, and design best practices for mobile devices compared to industry averages reported by Silverpop.

Silverpop, a widely recognized industry leader in email solutions, recently published their 2012 Email Marketing Metrics Benchmark Study. This study examined messages sent in 2011 (all four quarters) and the first quarter of 2012 by its client base. Researchers looked at all messages sent by 1,124 brands/companies from 20 countries. A broad set of message types was included in the study – from promotional emails and content-based newsletters to notifications and transactional messages.

Embry-Riddle Worldwide utilized Intellilworks CRM (Customer Relationship Management tool) to manage its email communication with prospective students. Numbers reported in this paper reflect data collected between March 2012 and August 2012, and represent 112,047 emails sent to inquiring/prospective students with the intent to provide information about the university and its programs and to steer the inquirer toward the application for admittance.

Open Rates. Silverpop measured open rates of emails sent in the “education” industry as the number of opened messages plus “implied opens” on text messages and HTML disabled email that recorded a click on a link. Worldwide’s metrics only record actual opened messages, so Worldwide’s open rate is probably under-reported and could actually be higher. *Why is this important?* It is implied that the higher the open rate, the higher the interest in the company and its messages.

Unique Open Rate	Average	Median	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile
Education	15.0%	10.7%	30.5%	6.1%
Worldwide	28.28%			

Source: Silverpop and Intellilworks

Click-through Rates. The click-through rate (CTR) is the number of unique clicks on links within email message divided by the number of delivered email messages. *Why is this important?* The amount of items a reader clicks on in an email would be an implied indicator of how interested they are in the organization and its offerings.

Unique Click-through Rates	Average	Median	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile
Education	3.0%	1.7%	7.8%	0.6%
Worldwide	1.93%			

Source: Silverpop and Intellilworks

Message Size. Message content, branding statements and logos, message length, the amount of HTML and images will determine the overall message size. Message size is rarely an issue when using office-networked desktop PCs, however with the increase in the use of mobile devices to view and open email, size does become important and optimizing message size for mobile use is increasingly becoming the new norm. *Why is this important?* In this “faster than the speed of light” age, the expectation is that email will load and display quickly, and if it doesn’t, there is a good chance your message will get discarded before it is even read. The recommendation for designing email for mobile readership is to keep the messages below 50KB to ensure they load quickly. Embry-Riddle Worldwide’s email communication to prospective students ranges between 15-28K, well within the recommended range.

Message Size	Average	Median	Smallest Quartile	Largest Quartile
Education	15.4	14.0	7.0	25.6
Worldwide	18.0			

Source: Silverpop and Intelliworks

Unsubscribe Rates. Unsubscribe rates measure reader disengagement. For whatever reason, the recipient has decided they no longer want to get your email messages and has unsubscribed. *Why is this important?* It is important for organizations to respect their email recipients’ time and to continually strive to design messages that are relevant, timely and interesting, thus keeping the reader engaged and interested in the organization.

Unsubscribe Rate	Average	Median	Top Quartile	Bottom Quartile
Education	0.19%	0.14%	0.05%	0.39%
Worldwide	0.25%			

Source: Silverpop and Intelliworks

Looking at these few simple metrics would indicate that Embry-Riddle Worldwide’s email communication with prospective students is performing well. The recommendation is to look at the few emails within the group that have low click-through rates to see if it might be possible to add a link of interest to keep the reader engaged with the Embry-Riddle Worldwide brand a bit longer. And if the reader stays engaged longer, it is reasonable to believe this could positively impact the unsubscribe rate as well.

While this writer has no documentation to substantiate this, there may also be a correlation between the open rate and the unsubscribe rate. As Silverpop’s data indicates, at an open rate in the 15% range, the unsubscribe rate is 0.19%. This writer wonders if this unsubscribe rate stays consistent as the over-all open rate increases. Embry-Riddle Worldwide’s open rate is almost twice that of the industry average, and one could speculate that this increase in opens might also warrant an increase in the unsubscribe rate. Further investigation would most likely shed some light on this. Additionally, it will continue to be of extreme importance to stay current with all trends involving mobile readership and to make appropriate adjustments as necessary.

Respectfully submitted
 Karen Doolittle
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