Outbound Communications Guidelines

Vision

*Emails sent by the University will use branding consistently, and will adopt a consistent look and voice. Messages will be personalised, welcome and well-received by our audience. The University will continue to manage email communications and audience privacy respectfully, in line with SPAM and Privacy legislation.*

Principles

Every communication with target audiences is important – it will impact their perceptions of the organisation, their experience and satisfaction (either positively or negatively).

To ensure optimal experiences for email recipients, it’s essential that messages are tailored to the individual avoiding irrelevant content – factors that should be considered include topic relevance, timing and frequency of messages.

Depending on the reach and impact of messages:

- proportionate levels of quality assurance and sign off must be applied
- distribution platforms will vary.

All eDM (electronic direct mail – emails) communications will be compliant with University policy and procedures, plus state and federal legislation (Information Privacy Act / SPAM Act / Disability Discrimination Act).

Context

Email is a vital communication channel between the University and its stakeholders, particularly current students, prospective students, staff and alumni.

Commonly emails sent by the University share information about diverse topics e.g.:

- Official regular newsletters and digests
- Student administrative notices – including enrolment, fees and statements, timetable management, exam and graduation information
- Critical announcements e.g. building works, system outages, emergency management etc.
- Sales and recruitment opportunities (including VTAC and direct offers)
- One-off emergency notifications
- Communications to individuals and small audiences e.g. academic staff communicating with class lists or individual students. Management communicating with teams via ad-hoc email or distribution lists.

There are three common distribution platforms/mechanisms in use for mass email at La Trobe:

- eDM Mailers – specifically Marketo, Adobe Campaign, and customer relationship management (CRM) tools, such as Oracle CX and Blackbaud. **Note:** Third-party platforms like MailChimp, Campaign Monitor and Eventbrite typically don't comply with GDPR and Australian privacy legislation. You should only use email platforms which have a formal vendor relationship with the University.
- Email distribution lists – usually via the University’s Outlook address book, or other enterprise list managers e.g. Listserv.
- Ad hoc emails sent from a staff member’s email account, or a team/department mailbox.

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# Audience and channel management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Channel &amp; activity</th>
<th>Business owner</th>
<th>Primary contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Prospective students | Sales and recruitment related eDMs e.g. Change of Preference, VTAC/UAC Offer to Census, UG / PG campaigns.  
Events and reputation building e.g. Bold Thinking, Ideas and Society, seminars and webinars. | Digital Marketing      | Brod Jackson               |
| Current students | Administrative emails e.g. information about enrolment, fees, Allocate+ and timetabling, exams, graduations.  
My La Trobe weekly student newsletter | SS&A                   | Fotios Lampropoulos      |
| Staff          | La Trobe News  
Staff Update  
From the VC’s desk | Internal Comms team, M&R | Sharyn Brady              |
| Alumni         | Alumni News  
Fund raising | Alumni and Advancement | Olivia Hovenden           |

*Fig 1.0 - Audience and channel matrix*

## Usage guidelines

Thought must be given to the purpose and necessity of each communication to avoid overloading recipients. Overloading recipients with emails results in the channel becoming ‘saturated’ and ignored and recipients opting out of receiving communications (where possible).

**General guidelines and best-practice:**

- **Compliance with Spam Act, Privacy Act and GDPR:**
  - Recipient **consent** (explicit or implicit depending on the circumstances) is required before we email them: the emails need to **identify** La Trobe as the sender.
  - Recipient can **unsubscribe** at any time (the only exception to this is the standard operational emails sent to current students and staff).

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Safe and private data storage is required, so third-party email marketing platforms should be avoided unless they have a formal relationship with the University with guarantee of safe and private data storage.

- **Targeted:** Messaging must be targeted to specific groups or audience cohorts.
  Example: if you want to remind students to pay their fees on time, generate a contact list of students who haven’t yet paid their fees – don’t send an all-student email which includes students who have already paid.

- **Call-to-action:** Messages must have a clear call-to-action.
  Clarification: General awareness campaigns are better suited to channels other than email including social media, app notifications or web content, or as an item in one of the established newsletters.

- **Frequency:** Each channel owner must not email an individual more than twice per day.
  Exceptions: Emergency management messages
  NB: La Trobe email marketing platforms (e.g. Marketo, Adobe Campaign) have in-built business rules to enforce frequency limits.

- **Timings:** Optimal time to email students is between 7am and 1pm, Monday - Thursday.
  Recommendation: Avoid late in the day messages as many people commute during this period and won’t engage with the message. Similarly, Fridays and weekends are typically low-engagement time zones for emails.

- **Contact points:** Inform contact centre staff (Customer Contact Centre / Ask La Trobe / Alumni Office) before emails are sent in case the message drives increased call volumes.
  Make sure any web content mentioned in the email is current, accurate and available.

**Execution**

After planning an email (or email campaign) as per the above guidelines. The content and execution strategy need to be signed-off by the channel contact person (refer to Fig 1.0 above). The appropriate channel and execution can be determined by assessing the strategic importance and audience size.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Broadcast e.g.</strong></th>
<th><strong>Complex eDM campaign e.g:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Inclusion in official newsletter (MyLaTrobe, Staff Update etc.)</td>
<td>- Series of multiple connected emails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Web content</td>
<td>- Dynamic content and personalisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Social media</td>
<td>- Reporting on engagement and outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Notifications (apps)</td>
<td>- SMS notifications included where appropriate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Self-managed e.g:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Standalone eDM or short campaign e.g:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Ad hoc emails</td>
<td>- 1 – 3 emails in series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Outlook contact groups</td>
<td>- Some personalisation and dynamic content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Outlook distribution lists</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Regular newsletters for specific cohorts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE ➔**

*Fig 2.0 - Execution matrix*
A large audience is defined as one with more than 250 contacts.

High strategic importance is defined based on impact on student load (e.g. admissions, enrolment or retention), or the safe and effective conduct of business-critical activities at the University.

Out of scope activities

The following activities are out of scope for sending of official messages from La Trobe University as they don't align with the principles outlined above:

- Use of unsupported third-party communications platforms like Mail Chimp, Campaign Monitor or Eventbrite, where there is no formal agreement between the companies that own these platforms and the University. This means that we cannot be certain that their data management processes and policies comply with our privacy and security requirements or Australian state and federal legislative requirements and may be responsible for breaches.
- eDMs or campaigns promoting ventures and activities not directly affiliated with La Trobe (e.g. not conducted by the University or one of its partners).
- Newsletters intended for smaller subsets (e.g. less than 10%) of a primary audience (prospective and current students, staff and alumni) e.g. project, department, college or school level newsletters.
- Web content hosted outside of the official La Trobe University website.

Self-managing newsletters in Outlook: Best practice principles

For smaller audiences, tools are available to support the preparation of newsletters – these provide templates to simplify the management of look and feel.

Consider your resourcing

Producing a newsletter takes time, requires effective writing and editing skills, and knowledge of publishing and distribution platforms. Do you have the resourcing and expertise in your team to regularly produce a quality newsletter?

Determine who your audience is and how to reach them

Outlook distribution lists e.g. for your team, school, college, department or division, are the preferred way to reach an audience as they don’t require extensive management. If a distribution list doesn’t exist for your audience, you can request one via Ask ICT (under the Email category).

Distribution lists can only contain La Trobe University email addresses, if you also need to include external recipients in regular email communications you can request a Listserv mailing list from ICT. Note that external members can unsubscribe at any time (in line with Spam laws). Note that you also need the individuals’ consent before adding them to a Listserv i.e. they’re informed at the time of providing their details that they may receive correspondence from the University.

For more information see: What is the difference between a ‘Distribution’ and a ‘Listserv’ mailing list?

If you’re communicating with a smaller group of people across different teams within La Trobe, you may consider making and self-managing your own contact group in Outlook.

Note about audience privacy: If you use a self-managed list of email addresses, or an Outlook contact group, make sure you insert recipient details in the BCC: field, not the To: field. If you put individuals’ email addresses in the To: field, they’ll be visible to everyone else who receives the email. This presents a couple of privacy issues:

- It leaks the individual’s email address to other people.
- It reveals that a person with that email address may have some connection to the subject matter of the email. This is particularly concerning if the subject matter is sensitive e.g. an event about a health or social issue.

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Using a Listerv or Distribution list bypasses the above risk because the email addresses are contained within a single distribution address, and aren’t visible to the other recipients.

Decide on a format and create your content

Team updates and other short format content for staff can be managed in a few different ways, often with greater flexibility and engagement than can be delivered via a traditional newsletter. Consider:

- **Forming a Yammer group** to share updates, ideas and discussions within your team. Yammer allows you to quickly distribute a range of content - text, images, video – and get immediate, real-time engagement and discussion. Note that Yammer groups are confined to internal users only.
- **Publishing your news to an intranet page.** This may serve as a resource for your audience, especially if you include “how-to” guides and other reference materials.
- **Creating articles, blogs or newsletters in Microsoft Sway.** For high-impact, visual newsletters consider building them in Microsoft Sway and sharing them with your distribution list (the members will receive a short email with a link to the Sway newsletter). Sway is part of the Office 365 suite.

More info:
- [Example of a sway newsletter](#)
- [Getting started with Sway](#)
- [How to create a newsletter in Sway (video tutorial)](#)

Traditional approaches include:

- Building short-form newsletters in Outlook. Decide on a standard header and footer for consistency, and create new body content for each edition.
- Building long-form newsletters in Word or Publisher, then distributing as a PDF. PDF has the advantage of being a stable format – you can be confident that your final version will look the same to most readers but please note that the content in PDFs may not be accessible to recipients with visual disabilities ([view info about making PDFs accessible](#)).

Build-in analytics

You can use tracking links to measure the number of clicks your emails’ call-to-action / other prominent content receives. You can create tracking links through free platforms like [Bit.ly](#) or [Google](#).

Distribute and seek feedback

After distributing your newsletter, get in contact with some of your audience members and ask for feedback. Specifically you want to know if the content is welcome, relevant and useful.

If a privacy breach occurs

Refer to the University Personal Information Policy:

35. Where a member of the University community discovers or is otherwise alerted to an actual, potential or suspected privacy breach, they must notify the Privacy Officer on (03) 9479 1839 or privacy@latrobe.edu.au as soon as reasonably practicable, or in any event within 24 hours of detection. This is also in accordance with the University’s Compliance Breach Management Policy.

The Privacy Officer will determine if a breach has occurred, will assess the severity and impact, and will identify actions required to mitigate the breach.