



EMAIL

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# How email metrics sharpen internal focus, increase ‘attention rate’

Data on consumption of newsletters and other messages help Baton Rouge General Medical Center segment employees, reach doctors early and offer guidance during a major flood.

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Internal communicators will tell you it happens far too often. They spend a month plugging an initiative or event, and yet some employee complains afterward, “Why weren’t we told about that?”

One might be tempted to respond: “You were. Sorry, Charlie. Next time, read your email.”

Yet what about essential crisis communications—or messages specific to one segment of your workforce? This could include updates to managers in a weather emergency, or information about plant closings and layoffs.

That’s why measurement matters, it’s essential to have access to accurate email metrics. At [Baton Rouge General](#), Communications Manager Carlie Boudreaux uses [PoliteMail](#) to understand how successfully she reaches 3,500 employees scattered across different workplaces and shifts.

This has been especially important in recent years, given that the organization closed Baton Rouge General Hospital’s Mid City emergency room, and communicated during a massive flood.

[FREE DOWNLOAD: [How email metrics better engage employees](#)]

Email measurement software helped ensure information was getting to managers, and that they were actually reading it, so they could then cascade that information to employees, Boudreaux says.

The communications team could tell managers: “I know you got this. Make sure that you’re telling your people what’s going on. Because they’re worried. They’re scared.”

The hospital announced it was [closing its ER](#) in 2015 amid state funding cuts, as it was losing \$2 million a month providing care to uninsured walk-ins. Leaders wanted to let people know that they weren’t losing their jobs and would be placed elsewhere.

Boudreaux says communicators wrote to managers telling them: “Here’s what’s happening. Here’s why it’s happening. Here are some questions that you might get from your employees. You need to know how to be able to address them.”

### **Tracking the newsletter**

On a more routine basis, Boudreaux tracks the weekly newsletter, which informs staffers about important matters such as open enrollment, tax forms, volunteer opportunities and coming events. Two-thirds of them work away from desks, scattered out on hospital floors and in clinics. Baton Rouge General has an open rate of about 35 percent.

“Each email has links or forms you can click on and download, and you can see what’s been clicked on [by your audience],” Boudreaux says.

Metrics such as opens and “attention rate”—a measure of people who are not simply opening and ignoring the message—helps when working with internal clients in nursing, education, human resources or other departments.

“We can go back to them and say, look, this got so many clicks,” Boudreaux says. “Either that’s good, or let’s try something else now. It’s helped position us as experts in what we do.”

It is frustrating when employees ignore an email, but this offers important conclusions. For example, the Continuing Medical Education department creates free courses online for the medical staff to help them attain the required annual credits.

“We worked with them,” Boudreaux says. “We put it in our MD letter. This was going to be the biggest thing since sliced bread. It was free. ... And it did not have a single click.”

The announcement was even the very first item in the newsletter, a position that normally draws more attention. Doctors also ignored a follow-up one-off email.

This helped communicators tell the continuing education department, “Hey, maybe we shouldn’t be spending our resources creating these things if they’re not going to use it,” Boudreaux says.

### **Courting morning people**

Good news can also emerge from the metrics. The hospital sees a 5 percent increase in readership if it distributes its newsletter before noon, Boudreaux says, as opposed to afternoon delivery.

For doctors and nurses, the email must go out early if it is to succeed.

“We send an e-newsletter to our medical staff,” Boudreaux says. “We actually like to send them more like 6 in the morning, because they get started so early.”

### **Reaching employees through the intranet and mobile**

Like many contemporary workforces, hospital staffers often spend their days away from computers. Baton Rouge General’s readership and attention numbers would be far higher if Boudreaux measured only desk employees, but the goal is better engagement companywide.

The organization is rolling out an intranet because everyone sees it—even employees who share computers and sign on to their individual accounts in the morning.

“They all log in to the intranet, and they see that every day,” Boudreaux says. “So, we’re putting news there instead of expecting them to read their email. ... You’re just making sure it’s in all these different spots so you can reach everybody.”

To make sure a given missive works for mobile, communications team members can check the email in advance through a “test send” function, Boudreaux says. This helps to rethink or redesign emails that appear too long or otherwise doesn’t work well on a phone.

### **Segmenting for success**

Successful email measurement software should work seamlessly with Outlook, so you can use (and track) your existing groups and distribution lists.

Baton Rouge General has an all-users list that reaches anybody with a brgeneral.org email address. It can also email just its 20 clinics around the city, or its two (soon to be three) hospital campuses, Boudreaux says.

For example, it’s important to be able to segment and tell people at the Bluebonnet hospital about an event that affects only them. The people working at the Mid City campus don’t need to know about that.

In the end, Boudreaux says, “You have to use every means you have to reach employees. Not everybody uses email. Not everybody uses the intranet. Not everybody prefers to get their news on the employee Facebook page. So I think it’s understanding where each audience gets their news and making sure it’s there for them.”

*This article is in partnership with PoliteMail.*

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