

Military OneSource Subscription

Prompting choices increases subscriptions to an electronic newsletter

importance of ongoing communications and reminders.

Agency Objective. Increase subscription rates to monthly Military OneSource electronic newsletter among interested active duty service members using behaviorally designed email communications.

Background. Military OneSource is a Department of Defense (DOD)-funded program that provides comprehensive information on military life to service members and their families. Its monthly OneSource eNewsletter offers a simple way to stay up to date on resources and programs relating to a variety of issues from deployment and moving to spousal employment and education. There are currently 60,000 subscribers, representing a relatively small fraction of the potential audience.

Methods. The DOD and the Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES) collaborated to compare the effectiveness of different modes of email communication in encouraging members of the military to subscribe to the newsletter. DOD and OES designed six email variants. Two versions of the email varied whether subscription was presented as a simple opt-in procedure (clicking on link) or an active choice to subscribe (or not).⁶⁶ The four other email versions described the benefits of subscription, but varied whether this information was presented as either a list or a quiz. DOD provided OES with a list of 491,879 emails that were randomly assigned to receive one of the six email communications.^{67,68}

⁶⁶ See, for example, Punam Anand Keller, Bari Harlam, George Loewenstein, and Kevin G. Volpp, "Enhanced Active Choice: A New Method to Motivate Behavior Change," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 21 (2011): 376–383.

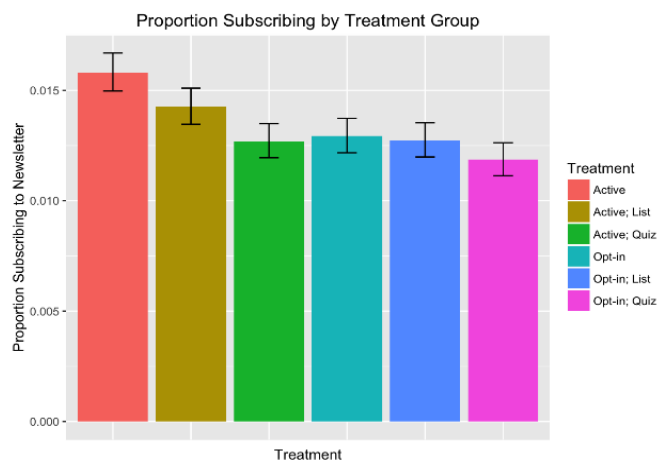
⁶⁷ Emails were sent out in batches of about 12,000 a day. DOD then provided OES with a list of new subscribers to the newsletter along with their dates of subscription as well as data recording the number of times links in the emails were clicked to visit the newsletter page.

⁶⁸ There were 7,759 new subscribers during the study period, 6,582 of which were matched to cases in the experiment because they provided the same email and/or name.

Subscription results presented here assume no systematic differences between people we could match and people who we could not match. Website visits are a proportion of total

Results. Overall, the study added over 6,000 new subscribers to the newsletter, expanding the subscription list by more than 10 percentage points; the study spurred 8,700 web visits across web browsers and devices. Average rates of subscription across treatment conditions were generally low (between 1.19 and 1.58 percent). Emails that presented the decision to subscribe as an active choice (i.e. "Yes I want to take advantage of the eNewsletter benefits" vs. "No, I prefer not to stay in the loop") outperformed those that simply provided a web link, generating an average subscription rate of 1.43 vs. 1.25 percent, a difference of 0.17 p.p. ($p < 0.01$, 95% CI [0.11,0.24]) and a rate of new website visits of 1.9 vs. 1.6 percent, a difference of 0.3 p.p. ($p < 0.01$, 95% CI [0.2,0.4]). The most effective communication strategies excluded lists or quizzes and kept the emails short (1.43 vs. 1.29 percent subscriptions (difference = 0.15 p.p., $p < 0.01$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.22]) or 2.1 vs. 1.6 percent new website visits, (difference = 0.5 p.p., $p < 0.01$, 95% CI [0.4,0.6])).

Conclusions. Simple, clear communications that present decisions as an active choice are effective at increasing subscriptions. The way in which the benefits of that action are presented also matters. Lists appear more effective than quizzes, but brevity is most important.



emails sent and involve no missing data. All comparisons reported here are statistically distinguishable at $p < .05$.