



Creative Capital

# Email Marketing Best Practices for Artists



# Email Marketing for Artists

Although you may not think so, email is still the top digital platform for building and engaging with audiences. While there are many ways to connect with a fan base these days, email—a service that is decades old—is the most direct way to get information in front of an engaged digital network. In this article, we will review some best practices for building your email contacts, sending out regular emails, and keeping people in your network informed and interested in your career.

## **Treat Your List of Email Contacts Like VIPs**

Why does email continue to be the best way to engage with your audience? When someone signs up to receive an email from you, they have to provide their contact information. That means they have flagged themselves as willing to go the extra mile to show that they're interested in your work. While it's very easy to "follow" someone on Instagram or Twitter, simply because the barrier of entry for signing up for your newsletter is a little higher, your audience has proven that they will be a stronger fan base than on other platforms. Secondly, when people are in their "reading email" mode they are typically in a more engaged mindset than when they're more passively scrolling through social media.

Finally, as social media companies try to monetize their platforms, they often use algorithms to push certain content above others, often favoring corporations that can spend money on ads. This means that 100% of the content you publish on social media won't always show up to the people who have followed you. With email, although there is a chance a subscriber might miss your email, you can generally assume that the majority of your messages will get through to your networks.

With all this in mind, you should take your list of email contacts very seriously. Treat your email contacts like a list of VIP clients, and spend time thinking about different ways to grow your list. These contacts, with a little bit of diligence, could become the most informed people about your work, and the most willing to engage with your practice.

## **Growing Your Email List**

There are many ways to increase the size of your email list. You should make it super easy for people who find your website to find out how to sign up for your newsletter. Don't hide the sign up form on one of your "contact" or "about" pages: consider putting it on the homepage of your website. If you made contacts through in-person events, or are networking digitally, you can send personal emails, and ask them if they would like to sign up to receive your newsletter. Due to new regulations, you should give your contacts an opportunity to "opt-in" to receive your email newsletters—just because you have emailed with them in the past, doesn't mean they have opted-in to your newsletter.



In each context, consider telling a potential subscriber about what they might receive when they sign up for your emails, like works in progress, updates about new work, exhibitions, or special events. Once they are prepared to receive this information, they are more likely to be engaged readers.

To increase the size of your contact list, you should think of running “acquisition” campaigns—essentially, an increased effort to gather new subscriptions over a finite period of time. For instance, you could say that subscribers will exclusively receive a new digital artwork every month, or they will be invited to a special Q&A or performance, depending on how much time you can commit. Whatever you choose to do, remember again that your email contacts should be considered among your most dedicated fan base—and they should be treated like VIPs.

Welcome emails are a good way to introduce yourself to your new subscribers. These emails usually have the highest open rates, so make sure to make a great first impression. Email marketing platforms can help you create emails that are automatically sent to anyone as soon as they subscribe for your newsletter. The email can introduce your new contacts to the kinds of newsletters you will send in the future, and you can direct them to your social media channels, website, and anything else that you want to bring to their attention.

As you send regular emails, and look at the analytics of who is opening and clicking around on those emails, you will begin to identify even more dedicated fans and better understand what drives your audience. If you are looking to drive people to your events, buy your work, or purchase tickets to see your work, these engaged contacts have identified themselves as the most ready to do that. Your job now is to make it as easy as possible to get them to convert their enthusiasm into concrete ways of supporting your work!

There are lots of articles about which email marketing platforms you can use to streamline creation of your newsletters, analytics, and more, like Mailchimp or Constant Contact. We recommend shopping around. Make sure that when you look up reviews of each platform that they are up to date, and no more than a year old. Once you have chosen an email client service, develop a few templates that match the look and feel of your website and digital presence.

Just as important as making it easy for people to subscribe to your list, make it easy for them to unsubscribe. Don't be too sensitive when people unsubscribe from your emails. Consider it more like an active way to keep up a fresh email list of engaged fans—plus, pricing of email platforms is often based on volume, so it's better to pay only for active subscribers. You may also consider having different types of preferences. For instance, have a list where people can sign up to receive emails on rare special occasions, and ones for more regular emails. This gives users the option to receive less emails from you, but still stay in touch.

### **How to Communicate Your Message Clearly**

Consider your own email inbox for a moment. It's probably full of junk that you have to make your way through to find important messages each time you open it. When you send an email to someone, they are seeing it among many other emails, in the same way that you would receive



another person's eblast. When developing a newsletter or email campaign, be clear and targeted in your use of visuals and language, and respect the time of your email reader.

With each email message you send out, you should have a general goal of what you want your contacts to do. This goal should be a little more targeted than something like “receive an update about my work.” These goals can be reached gradually over a period of months or years, and may take a series of several emails.

For instance, if you are getting ready to open a solo exhibition, you could update people on the progress of your work, and lead them up to the opening reception through a series of emails. If you are about to publish a book, send them excerpts over the course of a few months. Over a series of emails, your readers will become more engaged and versed in your practice—they will begin to connect the progress you are making toward a singular goal, and help you meet it.

Above all, you should be clear about the goal of your email—it should go beyond just keeping your audience up to date, but also be singular and targeted. Because email subscribers are the most engaged audiences, you will be more effective if you use your email to drive them to a focused outcome: whether it's buying your new book, purchasing a new print or tickets to your show or screening, or even clicking around on a website. **The goal should get the users to go somewhere or do something beyond the email.** Funnel their attention towards a main link that leads them there, and use buttons to make it obvious where you want them to click.

### What's in the Email?

Whether you are sending one email or a series of emails, you should remember that even if someone has signed up to receive your newsletters, they may not remember who you are, or why they signed up in the first place. Unless you send very regular emails, each email should start off with a general introduction about either yourself, or the concepts you are interested in discussing.

Think of the message of the email as an accompaniment to the image. Emails should ideally be anchored by one image that connects easily to the content of your writing. It's OK to have a couple of images in an email, but don't go overboard with too many images. Don't make the body of your email just an image with a link leading somewhere else either. Images don't always show up in other people's emails, and this will also make it more difficult for people to search for your messages later. You want to alert your audience to the point of your email, and the images should provide some visual clues, sort of like a journalistic article. Without much context, people tend not to click through on the links.

Do not use press release language! Press releases are designed to spell out the specifics of an event or exhibition for press who may write a story about an artist's work. This language wouldn't be very exciting to an audience who is looking to engage with you and your work on a more intimate level. Instead, we suggest more personal and down-to-earth language. Communicate to your audience as you would email your friends and family about your work.



Email is typically used for personal or professional communication, and when you are looking through email, you expect to see writing that matches either of these kinds of tones. Think about giving your email audience a special window into your practice that they wouldn't get through a typical gallery release or event announcement—the tone should be personal, but also respectful and professional. Share updates about the development of new work in progress through previews and teasers, or discuss challenges you are facing, or breakthroughs you have reached. Make your audience feel like they have a direct connection to your work.

### **Keep It Short and Punchy**

You should also weigh the economy of your words. People making their way through their inbox are typically pressed for time, so get to the heart of the matter as quickly as possible. If something requires a longer, more in-depth description, consider building out a special landing page on your website where readers can click to learn more. These clicks will also help you better understand who is really interested in taking the time to read about your work.

Finally, spend a good amount of time thinking about the subject line because it is often the most important part of an email. Subject lines are the key factor that determine if your audience opens or ignores your messages. If your subject is bland or vague, emails tend to be deleted or remain unopened, whereas those that tease out the content will be opened more frequently. You want to be upfront about what the email is about—don't mislead—but make it enticing to open at the same time. Try to keep the subject line at 50 characters or less, as longer subjects tend to get cut off.

Keep the format for the body of the email simple, easy to read, and mobile-friendly. Try not to add too many image elements or columns, which can jumble information or make the email take a long time to load. Before you send the email, you can send yourself a preview of it, which most email marketing platforms allow you to do, to make sure nothing is getting cut off. The various email providers that your contacts use (like Gmail or Outlook) will display emails differently, so keep the design as simple as possible.

### **How Often Should You Send an Email?**

The question of how often to send an email is tricky, and can depend on the volume of new work or initiatives. If emails are too seldom, your audience might forget about you, but if you email too often, you risk more contacts unsubscribing from your list. If you're an institution with regular and consistent programming, a weekly email might be welcome in the inboxes of people looking for new ways to see art. Generally, if you're an individual artist, we recommend sending at least a seasonal update. If you have more to update, a monthly email is probably enough to keep your audience informed.

As new platforms continue to evolve, they rise and fall in popularity. It's difficult to keep up with the different algorithms that will favor or hinder your content from being seen. Above all, we find that because digital companies have to monetize their platform, it's the individual user, and just as often artists, that loses out. Because email has a practical use, it has become the go-to way to reliably keep in touch with an audience. As you build a database of email contacts, you can move from provider to provider with your audience.