

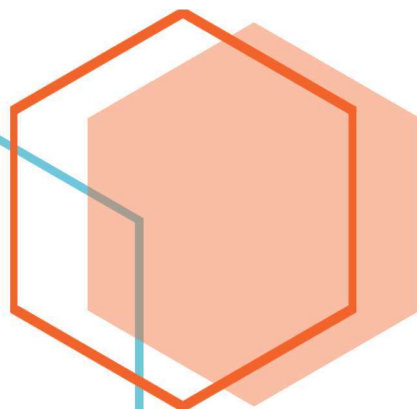


Email Analytics Report

The Office of Representative Larry Hoff

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This report is based on data, compiled from multiple sources, pertaining to both email engagement rates overall and government-specific email. Included in the report are statistics, analysis, and recommendations.



Introduction

This study was initiated by the office of Washington State Representative Larry Hoff and focuses on the office's internal email engagement rates. The office had concern that their email engagement rates were not within an acceptable range of industry standard rates. The scope of the study primarily focused on the unique open rate, also referred to as the open rate throughout the report. The open rate is one of the four primary metrics under the blanket term of engagement rates. The unique open rate, or open rate, reflects the percentage of emails that were opened out of those sent to a recipient successfully.

There were three steps to the study, first it was necessary to establish industry standard of engagement rates, second was to compare them to those of Representative Hoff's office. The third part, if merited, was to research areas of improvement relating to open rates.

Opening an email is the second step in an individual's relationship with that email. The first is seeing it. After seeing the email, the recipient must choose to open the email. They may open the email because they are familiar with the sender, or the subject line may capture their attention. To get individuals to open an email, the best position you can put yourself in is at the top of the inbox with a subject line that incentivizes the reader to open the email.

Individuals interact with media in different ways, at different times, and to differing extents. To send out email newsletters without tact can lead to inconsistent results. At the time of this study the most recent newsletter sent by Representative Hoff's office was sent at 12:15pm on a Friday. At any given time, there is a finite number of individuals who are checking their email. Open rates are subject to the number of individuals who have seen an email.

One can imagine that a portion of the subscription list who work at a desk job could take a late lunch and miss the newsletter completely. The email could be buried by other emails during the gap in observation. However, there could be factory workers who were only able to check their email during that time period.

This is all speculation, as this study does not aim to define media-related behavior on an individual or group level. Rather, it aims to collect data points from sources that reflect engagement rates and develop recommendations for Representative Hoff's office based on observed trends.

Executive Summary

During the course of the study, it was found that Representative Hoff's office email engagement rates were insufficient when comparing them to standard rates in government. Multiple sources were tapped that contained industry specific data on email engagement rates. The average taken from these sources was then established as the industry standard. Gov Delivery, a system created by Granicus, tracks engagement rates for Representative Hoff's office. The scope of this study focused on open rates, and Representative Hoff's office open rate was 16 points lower than the industry standard.

Using a multitude of online sources, it was found that the measurable factors that relate to open rates were, the time of day that the email was sent, day of the week that the email is sent, and length of subject line. There were inconsistent results across different sources due to the nature of the studies performed. Most of the studies used were "in-house" and thus subject to the tactics and standards of the source. However, comparing the sources allowed for trends to be found and those trends turned into recommendations.

The nature of email marketing is steeped in sales culture. The primary goal of these sources is to maximize engagement rates for companies and individuals that aim to promote consumption of products. The newsletter from Representative Hoff is a product that is not a focus in this area, as public newsletters are not revenue generating. Additionally, recommendations on government email engagement rates weren't readily available. Aside of industry specificity, the general recommendations found in the email marketing sector directly relate to open rates and should impact Representative Hoff's email engagement rates.

Recommendations

- Separate Representative Hoff's email subscription list into 4 sections and send the newsletter at different points during the week of outreach.
- Send 2 sections on Tuesday, one at 6am and the other at 10am, send the 2 remaining sections on Thursday, one at 6am and the other at 10am.
- Record open rates for the 4 sections independently.
- Be consistent with the number, frequency, and timing of email newsletters sent.

Analysis of Findings

Methodology

The scope of this project was primarily focused on the open rate metric for Representative Hoff's office emails and how it compares to industry standards. The initial step in developing this report was to frame the current standing of Representative Hoff's office email numbers. This was done by establishing a standard of email engagement rates among government and comparing those numbers with Representative Hoff's office. The industry standard was established by collecting data from six separate email statistics websites. These sources were divided up by industry, allowing for a distinct comparison. After charting out the data from the sources, an average was taken from each of the metrics and used as standards for this study.

The overall engagement rate was broken down into several different metrics. The metrics used in this report were open rate, click rate, bounce rate, and unsubscribe rate as defined below;

(All rates are typically expressed through percentages)

Open Rate: The open rate is number of individual openings of the email *out of those who received the email*.

Click Rate: The click rate refers to the number of individual clicks on a hyperlink embedded in the email *out of the emails that were opened*.

Bounce Rate: The bounce rate is the number of emails that didn't make it to the recipient for various reasons.

Unsubscribe Rate: The unsubscribe rate is the number of users who unsubscribed from an email subscriber list.

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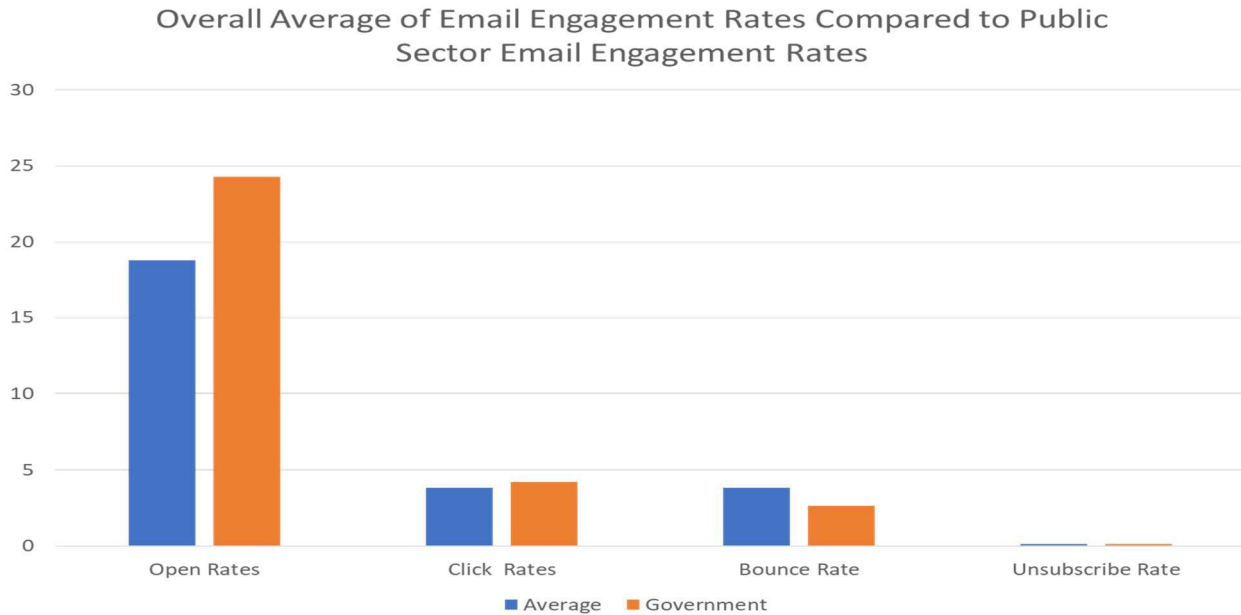


Figure 1. The chart shows the comparison of general email engagement rates across all industries to the rates of government (percentages).

To develop a comparison between office engagement rates and the industry standard, numbers were needed from Representative Hoff's office. Using data collected from the Gov Delivery system by Granicus, this report was able to establish accurate statistics in reference to the comparable metrics.

After a significant disparity was shown from the industry standard and Representative Hoff's office numbers, the focus of this study shifted towards reconciling the difference.

The next step was identifying aspects of email engagement that are shown to have different statistical outcomes depending on controllable factors. Using a multitude of online sources, three metrics were selected as viable for this report. The metrics are:

Optimal day of the week to send an email/newsletter.

Optimal time of day to send the email/newsletter.

Optimal length of subject line.



Several other factors are analyzed within the report but are not subject to encompassing statistical analysis. Content of the subject line, type of device used for email, and frequency and consistency of contact are not subject to the same type of comparison as the three metrics mentioned previously.

This study used a variety of sources for differing purposes. No sources both quantified standards across industries as well as recommended changes to advance rates across all factors. Recognizing a standard, recommendations for the optimal time of day and day of the week, and recommendations for the ideal subject line length were established with separate sources that occasionally overlapped.

For example, Smart Insights was used to establish an industry standard as well as the optimal time of day and day of the week. However, the source was not used in establishing the ideal subject line length due to a lack of data. This study worked to established trends through a patchwork of data, and rarely was able to use one source for all the needs proposed by the study. Various sources were used throughout for talking points and establishing a framework.

Findings

Current Standing

When comparing the statistics of email engagement rates from Representative Hoff's office with those of the government standards, a substantial difference is shown in every metric. The office open rate, the focus of the study, is 66% lower than the industry standard. The click rate is 52% lower, the bounce rate is 207% higher, and the unsubscribe rate is nearly 5000% higher than industry standards.

The unsubscribe rate can be potentially explained by the dynamic in which the subscription list was obtained. The list was purchased for Representative Hoff's office upon his entry into office in 2019, meaning that signing up for this service was not an intentional act by those on the list. The high unsubscribe rate could be a short-term correction. Nonetheless, these numbers show an inconsistency in what can be reasonably expected regarding engagement and what is occurring.

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Figure 2 visualizes this difference across several sources. While there are outliers and missing data points, it is clearly shown that the office numbers are insufficient in all categories when compared to the average of all sources. Figure 3 (page 6) isolates the average of all four metrics and shows a clearer comparison between the standard and office numbers.

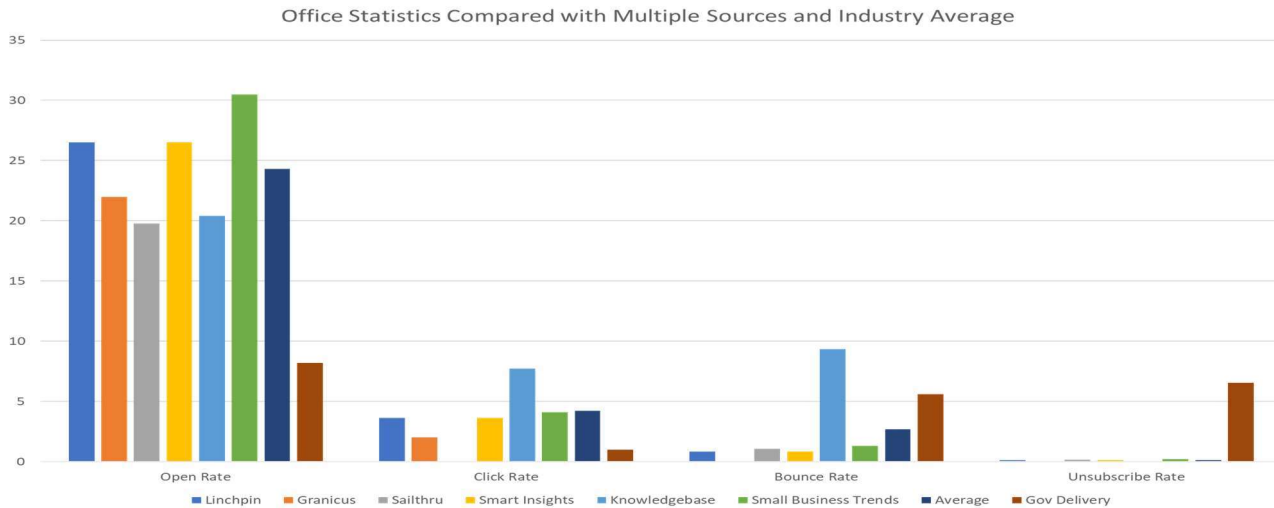


Figure 2. Gov Delivery statistics compared to multiple government-specific sources and government average (percentages).

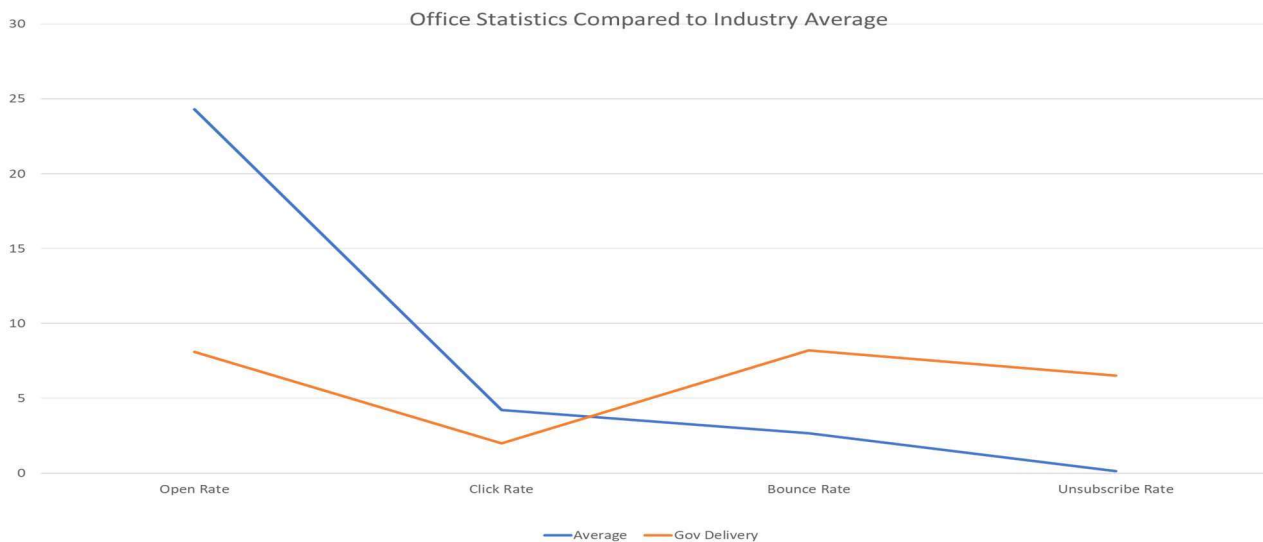


Figure 3. Gov Delivery statistics compared to government average (percentages).

Source Recommendations (Quantifiable)

Day of the Week/Time of Day

According to Constant Contact, an email marketing site, the standard day of the week and time of day for Government email newsletters are Wednesday and 8:00pm, respectively. They do not imply that these are optimal for the industry, rather observe the findings for the current trends in Government email.

Time of day and day of the week are vital due to the exponential drop in readership after the first hour of receiving the email. According to a study done by GetResponse, more than 23% of email openings happen in the first hour after sending. Between two-four hours that chance drops to less than 8%, between 5-15 hours it drops to less than 3%, and between 16-24 hours after sending there is a less than 1% chance of the email being opened. After 24 hours, the chances of email engagement are virtually 0.

The following information refers to optimal day of the week across all industries. According to three of four sources used for the day of the week metric, Thursday is the most effective day to send emails when prioritizing the open rate. Campaign Monitor, Omnisend, and Smart Insights came with this consensus. Smart Insights quotes an average of 18% open rate, while the other two sources do not cite a statistic.

GetResponse was the dissenting source, claiming that Tuesday is the day of the week that provides peak open rates. At the time of their study, the open rate on Thursday was approximately 21%, but Tuesday had approximately 22% open rate. The percentage difference is minimal when comparing it to other days of the week. The message matched another study done by GetResponse, but the percentages were 17.25% and 17.93% for Thursday and Tuesday respectively. The statistical difference between Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday were minimal across all sources.

The same sources were used from day of the week to show the time of day based on the similar nature of the factors. The recommended time of day to send an email varied among the sources. GetResponse claims 6am, Omnisend claims 8am, and Smart Insights claims 10am to be the best time of day to send an email newsletter when optimizing open rates. Campaign Monitor did not have a recommendation for time of day.

Length of Subject Line

The subject line is the first interaction a recipient has with the email. A study conducted by Aweber of 1,000 email subject lines claims that the average length of a subject line is 43.85 total characters. According to Business2community.com 43% of recipients open emails solely based on the subject line.

Campaign Monitor cites a study by Marketo showing that four-word subject lines are the most effective for open rate. The study involved sending 100,000 emails for each word count category. Four words came back with an 18.26% open rate. The following count category with the second highest open rate was five with 17.1%. The open rate falls off after seven words (approximately 41 characters) to 12.2% at eight words. A 2016 study by Boomerang supported this with a claim of three-four words being ideal, but they did not cite a study or support the claim with data.

A study by GetResponse contradicts this finding and claims that 18-24 words is the optimal range for open rates when considering the subject line length. A study by Retention Science lands somewhere in between at six-ten words with a 21% open rate attributed to that length.

Factoring out the first three email newsletters for a settling period, the highest number of opens for an email newsletter for Representative Hoff's office contained 14 words in the subject line with 2607 opens (9.3%), while the lowest number of opens had nine words in the subject line with 1719 opens (6.4%). The average number of words contained in the subject line of the three lowest performing email newsletters was 12.33, and the average number for the three highest performing subject lines was 11.66, disputing the implication when contrasting the single highest and lowest performing email newsletters.

This data suggests that the length of the subject line in Representative Hoff's email newsletters is less important than the subject matter in the subject line, as the averages of the two extremes regarding word count is less than a word off. Three of the four sources pointed to a shorter subject line having a better statistical outcome. However, this does not appear to apply to Representative Hoff's email newsletter. Due to the nature of the newsletter (governmental and informational), the subject line could be a relatively insignificant factor.

Source Recommendations (Non-Quantifiable)

The non-quantifiable recommendations from the sources used in this study involve the content of the email, frequency of outreach, and demographics of recipients. The scope of this study is limited to optimizing open rates based on statistics, but this area is vital for a tapered remedy for low engagement rates.

Different demographics interface with email differently. If the 18th district consumes email primarily by mobile devices, then it is vital that the information in the email be consumable in that format. There are three types of devices that individuals check their email on, the desktop computer, the laptop computer and on mobile devices. Campaign Monitor claims that in 2018, 61% of individuals used mobile devices when checking email. For 2019, Smart Insights offered a broad range of mobile email utilization with 24-77%, depending on the recipient. These devices are inherently smaller with smaller screens on which to fit subject matter. Using the zoom feature on a mobile phone to read an email newsletter can be considered inconvenient.

Below is an example of the most recent email newsletter sent by Representative Hoff's office on a mobile phone in both landscape and portrait mode. The view is approximately the same size as seen on an iPhone 8. (While it requires the reader to open the email to see the content, a poor interface may impact future open rates.)

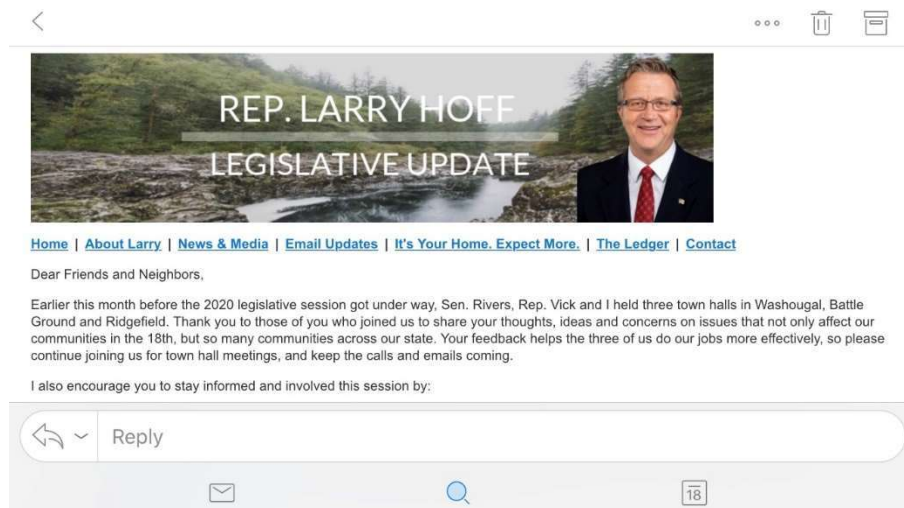


Figure 4. An actual landscape view of Representative Hoff's most recent email newsletter on a mobile phone (shown through Outlook).

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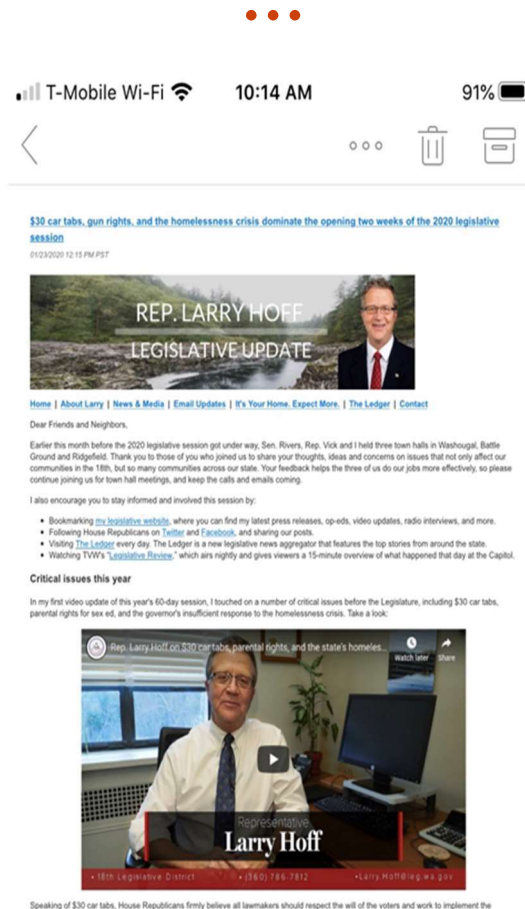


Figure 5. An actual portrait view of Representative Hoff's most recent email newsletter on a mobile phone (shown through Outlook).

There were no specific recommendations from sources that speak to the frequency of emails. There was a theme of different recipient groups responding to frequency differently. However, there was widespread consensus on the importance of sending emails on a consistent basis to manage recipient expectations.

Challenges

The primary challenge this study faced was the lack of industry specific recommendations that aim to improve engagement rates. Through various sources we were able to establish standards in government engagement rates, but when attempting to find statistics pertaining to optimizing metrics, the primary source of information came from email marketing sites that did not divide efficacy by industry. The data used came with the intent of maximization across all industries, which can lead to inconsistent effects in government engagement rates. The data also assumed that the purpose of maximizing engagement rates was that of sales.

Moreover, the data used in the study was frequently contradicting. Using multiple sources this report can conclude that there are certain times of the day and days of the week that perform better than others (all sources claimed that weekends were poor for open rates). However, the sources cited did not unilaterally agree on how to obtain open rate maximization.

Recommendations

Based on the findings in this report, it is recommended that Representative Hoff's office adjust their tactics in email newsletter outreach to raise open rates closer to that of the industry standard. It is vital to know one's market in setting and meeting and expectations. Factors such as age, socioeconomic status, and profession can show substantial variations in the way individuals interact with their email. In lieu of comprehensive demographic information on individuals living in the 18th district, there is a tactic that should be implemented to create a feedback loop.

As opposed to picking a single time and day to send an email newsletter, it is recommended that the office divide up the subscription list and send the email at different times. This will give an idea of what the optimal time of the day and day of the week is for your specific group of recipients without performing a significant study. The findings show Tuesday and Thursday to be the prevalent days to send emails when attempting to maximize open rates. Optimal times show between 6am and 10am. It is recommended that during the week of the next newsletter, the office divide up the subscription list into four sections or groups.

Once the list is divided, send one group of newsletter emails at 6am and one at 10am on Tuesday, as well as one at 6am and one at 10am on Thursday. This will isolate the ideal sending window for Representative Hoff's subscribers by reflecting different open rates. Once the data is collected from all four groups, choose the day and time that provided the highest open rate. The office should establish a schedule around this chosen date and time. Continue to use this day of the week and time of day moving forward to establish expectations with recipients.

To best improve Representative Hoff's email engagement rate, a future study is recommended. In order to anticipate and fulfill the expectations of the recipients of Representative Hoff's email newsletters, constituents of the 18th district, a study needs be performed that outlines and provides insight into the demographics of the district.

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