

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is increasingly using email to distribute information and make contacts. This includes e-newsletters, marketing upcoming events, and sending information to our volunteers and clientele groups and clubs.

As we become more sophisticated in using email we need rethink our methods and use more sophisticated means to manage and distribute large email efforts. There are legal requirements to meet and some best practices to be aware of that will save you time and help you get the most bang from your email effort.

There is no clear cut definition of what makes up a large email distribution. To be sure we do the best job possible we should consider any email that involves external Extension clientele or potential clientele and goes to more than a select group like a committee as a large distribution. Examples are newsletters, event marketing, volunteer announcements, and emails to our organizations.

### **First, about the legal requirements (CAN-SPAM Act, Federal Trade Commission)**

1. All large email distributions must have instructions for people to unsubscribe. You must include clear instructions on how to “opt-out” of your list. A URL or to an email address for unsubscribe requests must be included.
2. The law also requires a physical mailing address be included in every mass email. This allows people to unsubscribe by ground mail and helps confirm the source of the email.

### **Second, some best practices:**

1. Spend time to cultivate and manage your email list. Promptly remove any address that is undeliverable. Develop a way to verify addresses, for example have people periodically re-register or reconcile the list against club, organization or sign-up records.
2. If someone does unsubscribe take them off your list promptly. If you continually send bad emails most companies will block your address.
3. Be sure the subject line of the email is meaningful and identifies the purpose and source, but not too long. Very short or cryptic subject lines will usually be flagged as junk mail or blocked and just not read.
4. Be sure the from address is recognizable and matches what a reader would expect to see. For example if you send an Extension newsletter with a from address of iamaclown@somemailplace it may cause the reader to mark it as junk or worse be blacklisted.

5. The body of the message should be concise and meaningful. If you send an email with one sentence, a short paragraph, just a link or two to a web resource or with an image it is likely to be marked as SPAM.
6. Make sure that the majority of your message is text. Do not make the body of your email a single graphic or image. Also, do not make your “call to action” (like “click here to register” or “Click to learn more”) a graphic only. In both cases, if the email program is set so that images do not download, then the email recipient will not know what you are trying to communicate or have them act on.
7. Be sure you are clearly identified in the message. Use your signature block with physical address, email and phone number.
8. If you are doing the email from Outlook or other personal email be sure to include a clear statement and instructions on how to unsubscribe.

**There is a better way:**

Corporate email systems like our AgriLife Exchange email system are not the best option to manage large lists and send bulk emails. They require a high level of effort to manage lists, subscribe/unsubscribe people, manually design and create the email and you get very little feedback to evaluate your effort.

The better option is to use an online email marketing service. Some of the benefits are:

1. The service helps you manage your contact lists; you can sub-divide or combine lists, and allows you to keep notes on the people or the lists. Unsubscribe requests are automatically processed and a report is made so you can see who opted out.
2. The services include templates and editors to help you create email with high quality professional appearance.
3. The services have help desks and online chat services for immediate help.
4. You will have access to statistics regarding your email. The services are designed to keep statistics on how many emails you send, how many are opened, and how many are not delivered or unsubscribe. That data helps you fine tune your effort.
5. You won't receive a flood of “undeliverable” messages. The service receives those and flags the addresses so it won't be used again. A report is generated so you can see who was removed.
6. Your computer and internal email communications won't be delayed while the system is bogged down sending large numbers of emails.
7. Mailing services include built in features to ensure that we are in compliance with the federal laws.
8. The AgriLife email system won't be blacklisted if multiple people report an email as abuse or spam. This happened recently

## Don't forget the proper branding and required statements

1. All emails must show appropriate affiliation with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension in text blocks and graphics.

*Example of header and footer with appropriate branding*



2. For use of Extension logo/marks:
  - Use of the AgriLife Extension mark (PNG is available at <http://agrillife.org/communications/extension/>) is required in either the header or the footer.
  - If you are using HTML to compose your mail or you are using a commercial provider, then the Extension mark graphic should be a clickable link back to <http://agrillifeextension.tamu.edu/>.
  - Use of the Extension mark should follow brand guidelines.
  - Resizing of the mark is acceptable, providing it is scaled proportionately and not distorted.
  - The Extension mark should be used on the left side of the header/footer and/or first if used in combination with an established secondary mark (like 4-H, TALL) or co-branding (like a county seal or university mark).
3. For text:
  - In your signature block, use of "Texas A&M AgriLife Extension" is required. This can be part of a branded footer or may be underneath before the unsubscribe information.
  - It is recommended after the signature block (usually after an extra carriage return/line space) adding: "Texas A&M AgriLife Extension is a member of the Texas A&M University System"
4. Your email should also include the required equal opportunity and accessibility statements. You can add these as text or as link to this site:  
<http://agrillifeas.tamu.edu/hr/diversity/equal-opportunity-educational-programs/>

More information on branding can be found on the AgriLife Communications web site:

Information on AgriLife Branding in general: <http://agrillife.org/communications/brand/>

Specific resources for AgriLife Extension: <http://agrillife.org/communications/extension/>

If you don't find what you need on branding you can contact John Chivvis in AgriLife Communications at [chiv@tamu.edu](mailto:chiv@tamu.edu) or (979) 845-2601.

**More about the email services:**

Constant Contact, Vertical Response and Mail Chimp are the most often recommended. All have some free level of service and all have low cost options. The free options usually include non-removable footers that identify the email service. The fee based services allow you to edit the footer and you can remove the mail services logo. You can contact these services online:

Constant Contact - [www.constantcontact.com](http://www.constantcontact.com)

Mail Chimp - [www.mailchimp.com](http://www.mailchimp.com)

Vertical Response - [www.verticalresponse.com](http://www.verticalresponse.com)

The services, both free options and fee based subscriptions are based on the number of contacts, not the number of emails sent. Monthly subscriptions start around \$10 per 500 contacts. You can send multiple emails per month. The free options are limited as to both the number of contacts and the number of emails that can be sent, but maybe large enough for your needs.