inboxgroup®

Exploit the Power of the Welcome

Dispensable, unimportant, unloved.

Such is the opinion held of welcome emails by many marketers. Optimizing the lowly confirmation that "your address has been added to the email list" is rarely a priority email marketing task. Many senders don't even bother with them.

The shocking news is that welcomes are actually the **best-performing email many organizations will ever send**.

In this whitepaper, we'll explain why welcome emails play a **hugely significant role** in email marketing. We'll offer tips on the content that goes into a winning welcome and outline sample welcome email messages to inspire your own.

inboxgroup®

Why send welcome emails?

Anyone who signs up for your email list has just interacted positively with your website or organization. Why else would they want your emails?

Right now, they are interested in you and what you have to offer. So any email you send them now has a much better chance of getting their attention than one sent when they've moved on to other tasks and topics.

That's the premise behind the value of one or more welcome messages that go out automatically to new subscribers. You can exploit the built-in attention bonus to:

1. Provide information that gives a long-term boost to your email and marketing success.
2. Familiarize subscribers with your emails, so future messages are more likely to be opened.
3. Drive immediate response, through appropriate links and calls-to-action.

One study found welcome emails achieved:
• Four times the open rate
• Five times the click rate, and
• Eight times the revenue per email of other promotional messages

In our experience, organizations that shift from the plain IT-generated welcome message to one, two, or more optimized HTML messages can often achieve a **double-digit increase** in response across the life of the subscriber.

What goes into a welcome message?

The business value of the welcome stems inevitably from its content. This includes both basic requirements and optional content that increases long-term email performance, drives action and loyalty, or supports other channels.

It's this wide selection of potential content that makes a multiple-message welcome email series attractive to marketers.

Basic Requirements

Confirm the Sign-Up | Thank the Subscriber | Establish Recognition

The Welcome

Welcome messaging obviously needs to thank the subscriber for joining the list and confirm the success of their subscription request.

Many welcome messages still draw on generic templates written by IT or software developers, where the words are treated like a line of code. For example:

"You are now subscribed to list: main_company_newsletterv2"

The welcome message sets the tone for future marketing emails, so the entire content needs the same brand personality and copywriting these other emails receive.

The **content** of your welcome message requires the same brand personality and copywriting your other email marketing messages reveive.

Lay the foundations of recognition

This "scene-setting" role is a critical aspect of the welcome that supports various elements of an email program, including inbox recognition.

Email users scan their inbox looking for signals that show an email deserves attention. Your welcome messages teach recipients which signals to use to identify your future emails, so the sender name, for example, needs to match the name that will be featured in later emails.

inboxgroup®

Equally, the preheader text style, colors, logos, images, styling and structure—particularly the top left area that appears in preview panes—need not be identical to typical campaign emails, but must be similar enough to **trigger recognition** when those emails start arriving.

Increase Long-Term Email Performance

Set Expectations | Provide Admin Information | Collect Data | Request Personal Whitelisting

These content options all aim to improve future email delivery and response.

Set subscriber expectations

This begins with supplementing and reinforcing the expectations set at sign-up. Describe what kinds of emails you will send and the associated benefits. For example:

> BAD: "Industry news."
>
> BETTER: "Jump ahead of the competition with news of important industry developments."

The perceived value of being a subscriber is higher if you can identify benefits that are exclusive to the email channel.

Also, give subscribers an idea of how often they can expect to hear from you.

Subscribers commonly report "too many emails" as a reason for unsubscribing from a list or marking emails as spam. Their willingness to get more emails from you is higher, the more value you deliver in those messages.

In our experience, willingness is also higher where the recipient is forewarned. So, setting frequency expectations is vital, especially if you're a heavy email sender. Just be careful not to place unnecessary limits on yourself: account for seasonal increases (such as during Q4 for the holidays) or trigger-based email programs.

inboxgroup®

Provide information on subscription management

Describe and/or link to subscription management features. How can people update their profile (such as changing their email address) or get off the list (unsubscribe function)?

Collect more subscriber data

Include a call-to-action to update preferences or profile information to better support better targeting. Make clear the benefits of doing so. For example:

BAD: "Update your preferences"

BETTER: "Tell us more about your favorite fashion brands so we can send you email better suited to your needs and interests."

Alternatively, you can use a question or poll in each welcome email, where the answers take the form of links. You can build out subscriber profiles using clickthrough data.

Reader Poll:
Are you on Facebook?
f
Yes | No

Request personal whitelisting

Ask subscribers to add your email address to their contact list to ensure they don't miss out on your emails. Webmail services, ISPs, and email software typically give email from contacts preferential treatment, such as direct delivery to the inbox or overriding default image blocks.

Adding an address to a contact list involves different names ("contacts", "address list", "safe senders", etc.) and steps depending on the software or service used by the subscriber.

Useful tactic: Segment your list by recipient domain and send customized instructions. So, new subscribers with an @yahoo.com address receiving "whitelisting copy reflecting the process and terminology used at Yahoo! Mail.

Drive Action and Loyalty

This next group of content options goes beyond the scene-setting and functional content to specifically drive action and build broader subscriber loyalty.

Reveal the benefits

Reinforce your description of subscriber benefits with examples from the past.

New subscribers haven't seen previous content and offers delivered by email. For them, **"old" content is fresh content.**

Consider sending them one or more standalone emails that recycle "old" material—those offers or content that got the best response in the past.

The combination of best content/offer with heightened post-sign-up interest can drive impressive response rates. Also, a simpler approach is simply to link to archived emails or to "best of" content and offers.

Reward the sign-up

If you offered an incentive to sign up, the **first welcome email should contain the reward** (or clear information on how to access the reward).

You can also thank new subscribers and establish the value of being on your list by offering an **unexpected reward**. Examples might be:

- A coupon or discount on the next purchase
- Free shipping on the next purchase
- Free or trial access to a service
- Extended customization options on a product or service
- A whitepaper or eBook

As before, the perceived value of the reward increases if it's exclusive to subscribers.

Note: You could also pitch the recycled "best of" content or offers as a reward.

inboxgroup®

Other links and calls to action

The extra attention given to the welcome is also an opportunity to encourage any number of additional actions, such as:

- Rate or review a product
- Send feedback
- Make a purchase
- View some content

For the last two, feature your most popular current content or offers, or create custom suggestions based on subscriber data or actions. Examples might be:

- Upsells based on recent purchases
- Recommended reading based on content preferences given during the sign-up process, or purchase incentives
- Purchase incentives based on recent browsing behavior (Amazon.com does an excellent job utilizing this tactic)

Support Other Channels

Provide Social Links | Add Local Content | Include Service Information | Promote Site Features

The welcome email can also support other channels and areas of your organization.

Social Links

Encourage new subscribers to share your welcome message, welcome offers, or new subscriber incentives with their social networks--Facebook, Twitter, Google+, etc.--via custom links to "status update" or "share" forms.

You can also link to your own pages at these social networks and encourage subscibers to interact with you there.

While social media has proved to be an excellent venue for interacting and communicating with customers and prospects, email is a far stronger channel for driving transactions. Studies show it's also the channel preferred by customers for commercial messaging.

inboxgroup®

The decision to promote your social network presence in your welcome messaging depends in part on whether you might hurt overall response by doing so. Do you want to indirectly encourage new and enthusiastic subscribers to move from a conversion-oriented channel (email) to a more conversational one (social)?

Support and service information

Provide information on how and where to contact your organization. For example:

- Store/office/branch location finder
- Contact details: Mailing address, telephone numbers, or email address
- Office or Support Hours
- Location of support pages, FAQs, user forums, user guides, product or service guides

This information can be customized based on the subscriber's zip code or other location data of your choosing. Instead of a generic store finder, for example, you can dynamically insert the details of the stores nearest to your subscribers' place of residence.

Alternatively, when the subscriber opens the email, a local map with important sites and information renders automatically **based on the location from which the subscriber is accessing the Internet.**

Site/shopping features

Welcome emails can introduce people to website features or guide them through website activities. For example:

- How to create a profile
- Using the product finder
- How to set up a wishlist
- How to rate or review a product
- The advantages of registering at the website and how to do it
- How to make a donation

When Should You Send Welcome Emails?

The simple answer: As soon as possible.

The main benefits of a welcome email depend on exploiting the **attention bonus** associated with the sign-up process. Since this bonus declines with time, the welcome message or the first in a series of such messages should go out as soon as possible after sign-up.

Sign-ups completed online, such as through a website form, should trigger an **immediate email**. The confirmation page that appears on submission of the form should also warn your subscribers to expect the welcome message.

Other technology channels used to process subscription requests, like SMS, should pass on the subscription data immediately through an interface with the online email system, or transfer batched data quickly (we recommend at least once a day).

Enter "offline" paper sign-ups (collected at tradeshows, for example) into the email system as soon as possible. If there are significant delays, consider replacing "paper" forms with mobile devices, particularly iPads or other tablet computers that can submit data directly to the email system.

One Welcome Email or a Welcome Series?

In this whitepaper, we've outlined a huge range of potential content for an effective welcome email. The more you want to include, the more sense it makes to split the welcome email into a welcome series.

The decision on the number and timing of messages within the series depends on various factors. For example:

- Capabilities of your mailing system
- Value of each potential content element in supporting your goals
- Email model
- Sending patterns
- The wider business model

inboxgroup®

As a result, the "right" timing and number of welcome messages varies on a case-by-case basis. Some examples:

Sample: Single, Basic Welcome Email

Sent immediately after sign-up
Thank You **Confirmation of Sign-Up** **Recognition Elements**

Sample: 3-Email Welcome Series for a B2B Media Site

Sent immediately after sign-up	48 Hours after sign-up	5 days after sign-up
Thank You **Confirmation of Sign-Up** **Recognition Elements** **Set Subscriber Expectations** **Sign-Up Reward** **Request Whitelisting**	**Subscription Management Info** **Collect Subscriber Data**	**If registered member:** **How to get more from the site** **Links to "best-of" content** **If not registered:** **The benefits of registration** **Links to "best-of" content**

Sample: 4-Welcome Email Series for a Retailer

Sent immediately	1 day after sign-up	3 days after sign-up	7 days after sign-up
Thank You **Confirmation of Sign-Up** **Recognition Elements** **Set Subscriber Expectations** **Sign-Up Reward** **Request Whitelisting** **Social Sharing Links**	**Top Offer from Last 2 Months** **Social Sharing Links**	**Sub Management Info** **Collect Subscriber Data** **Local Store Information**	**If a customer:** **Upsell based on past purchases** **Social sharing** **If not a customer:** **Second top offer** **Social sharing links**

WHITEPAPER

inboxgroup®

Planning and implementing a welcome email series can be a challenge. If your organization requires assistance in this area or other areas of email marketing, please get in touch.

A FULL SERVICE EMAIL MARKETING AGENCY

BRILLIANT STRATEGY. BEAUTIFUL CREATIVE. SEAMLESS INTEGRATION

1.888.504.6269   INBOXGROUP.COM