



Conference Marketing: 9 Emails and When to Send

By Paul Hanscom, CAE, Vice President of Marketing & Business Development

A marketing-savvy association should send nine different emails to boost attendance at its annual conference — and there are specific times when these messages can have the greatest impact.

1. One Year in Advance: Save the Date

The success of next year's conference starts at this year's conference with branding, theme, logo and a takeaway piece promoting the host city and venue.

2. Ten Months in Advance: Invitation to Make a Presentation

Content submissions tied to the specific conference theme(s)/goal(s) are solicited, inviting members to be part of the association's success.

3. Eight Months in Advance: Invitation from the Keynote Presenter

Advancements in video technology have eliminated the financial and technical barriers that once made video invitation messages accessible to only the most sophisticated organizations willing to make such an investment. With eight months to go until the actual event, your goal is to capture momentum from the last conference and build a sense of intrigue about what's coming. A video invitation from the biggest headliner of your event will spark curiosity from a much broader audience than may ultimately attend the conference, but this awareness will reinforce your organization's overall credibility and may entice previously disengaged professionals to take notice of your other offerings going forward.

4. Seven Months Out: VIP Early Registration

Offer a special registration deal to those who attended last year. Build enthusiasm among your strongest supporters.

5. Six Months Out: Open Registration

This email should feature a reminder of the conference goals/themes, a description of learning tracks, and three things that will be unique/different about this year's event.

6. Five Months Out: Top Three Justifications

Keep your message focused on the most powerful reasons to attend; a lengthy list of low-value reasons to attend the conference will seem frivolous and self-serving. Not only that, but the vast majority of those who receive your email won't read past the third point. Include a link to a justification letter that potential registrants can share with their employer.

7. Four Months in Advance: Testimonial Message

This is your opportunity to highlight the reasons from your justification message — but put it in the words of those who are well-known in the profession. Get testimonials that reflect the distinct market segments that your conference aims to serve.

8. Three Months in Advance: Early Bird Rate Reminder

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9. Two Months Out: Personal Message from Conference Chair

This message should come directly from the conference chairperson and be informal in tone. It should say something like, "I saw you weren't registered yet for this year's conference and I want to make sure you don't miss out. Do you have any questions or is there anything I can offer to help make sure you can be there?" It's easy to ignore the broad sweep emails but a personal message from an individual will usually prompt a reply.

Bonus Conference Marketing Tips

Get segmented: In addition to these emails, you can also include segmented emails that target specific audiences within your membership — such as messages with content targeted to young professionals, mid-career professionals, or industry legends. Content for buyers,

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vendors, academicians, manufacturers, students, or other sectors of your audience are equally or even more effective. All segmented marketing should include testimonials from those in the market segment (or those they want to meet, e.g. buyers) and featured conference content that is specifically designed for that market segment's needs.

Source locally: Don't forget your local connections, too. Reach out to professionals in close geographic proximity to the conference venue to let them know you're coming to their area, making for a cost-effective and convenient opportunity. You can either do this directly or through the local chapter, a partner organization, or through a local member referral program.

Be social: Any email marketing effort is enhanced by adding a social media component. Whether it's LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter or another platform your members prefer, multi-channel marketing reinforces the email message through a different avenue and offers potential registrants an opportunity to like, share, or comment on your communication.

Developing an email marketing plan for an annual conference can seem overwhelming at first. Make every email count by including valuable content that's worth your members' time to view and that compels them to take action and be part of your successful conference experience.

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