



How to ensure your message gets through to parents

There are many things that come into play when a text or email is sent. This guide helps explain what might affect the delivery of your message and outlines best practice.

Did it get through?

Attachments

One thing to consider that can affect the delivery of an email is the attachments. If an attachment is too big it can bounce from some mail servers. Instead of attaching a newsletter to an email, try sending a link within the email. This reduces the size, is still the same amount of clicks to open and increases the deliverability rate.

Read receipts

Read receipts, or delivery reports, are bounce back messages that the sender receives when the email or text has been opened by the recipient. These can be set up through your email address or cell phone and is a good way of tracking important messages.

For important messages, you can see who is opening them and then decide whether or not you need to follow up. For example, an emergency closure may require texts to be sent to all parents. If some parents are shown to not have opened the message, you can call them to ensure they become alerted to the situation.

Receipts or delivery reports are easy to set up and can be turned on and off so you don't receive them for non-urgent communication such as newsletters.

Responses

Sometimes a response is necessary from a message, but consider the ramifications from this. Do you really want to receive hundreds of phone calls, emails or texts? Do you have the systems and resources in place to manage the responses?

Spam filters - Why they get stuck

Email hosts put spam filters in place to try and eliminate schemes, “junk mail”, and inappropriate content getting through. Unfortunately the way these are set up means that your legitimate emails sometimes get marked as spam.

Spam filters look for hundreds of criteria but there are some common, big ones that trap emails.

Here are some tips for writing emails that will minimise the chance of being marked as spam:

- Personalise emails – add a first name of who the email is going to as it seems less like a mass email blast and more like an individual email
- Use a personal reply-to address – using a noreply@ email address will increase the chance of the email ending up in a spam folder
- Use hyperlinked URLs rather than writing out website addresses – a lot of spam emails include links to “trap” websites so these may get picked up by the spam filters. Hyperlinking the URL is when a word or couple of words is highlighted and clicking on it takes you to a website. This saves typing the web address out in full but is still an easy way for people to get to the website
- Avoid typing in capitals – WRITING A SENTENCE LIKE THIS alerts spam filters
- Avoid red and green fonts – use regular font colours such as black, grey or blue, as opposed to putting whole emails in alternative colours
- Avoid “test” in the subject line – “test” emails get picked up by spam filters. If you are communicating about tests, use “exam” or “assessment” instead (in the body of the email it’s fine)

HELPFUL TIP:

To hyperlink something, highlight the text you wish to have linked to the website (a word or two), right click on this and select “hyperlink”. From there you can copy in the web address you want people to visit.

Urgency of a message

Getting parents to understand the urgency of a message can be difficult and is something that some schools struggle with. Ultimately, it comes down to using the right keywords and formatting messages in the right way.

If the urgency of a message isn’t understood then the message might get dismissed.

Some reasons why parents may not realise that the message is important include:

- Waffling – the message gets lost in the text and people tend to switch off. If you are clear and straight to the point then there are less miscommunication issues
- Mixed messages – if you aren’t clear what your message is about, the recipient may not understand the intent of the message. Be sure about what it is you need to communicate and read back through the message a couple of times to ensure you are saying what you mean. Get someone else to read it and check that they understand the intended message.
- Wrong medium – often paper based messages (like newsletters or reports) aren’t interpreted as urgent due to the time taken to get to the parents (as well as the likelihood of it getting lost at the bottom of a bag). Consider what medium you need to use to convey the message in relation to its urgency. Instant electronic mediums via text and email are the best ways to communicate urgent messages.

It is important to ensure that parents have been informed of the procedures for cancellations or closures when they first arrive at your school. This way, when they receive a text message they know that it could be an urgent one, not just another generic communication. Their understanding of the acronyms and keywords used is also important to help interpret the message correctly.

CHECKLISTS

TEXT MESSAGING

- ✓ Include the school acronym (e.g. MACCOL for Mackenzie College)
- ✓ State what they need to know first (what the issue is and what day it occurs, e.g. School closed due to snow today Tues 01/06/2015)
- ✓ Outline what action is required from the parent (e.g. please do not enter school grounds due to building damage)
- ✓ Keep message short and under 160 characters
- ✓ Consider if the parent needs to respond? How do you want them to do this?
- ✓ Sign-off with the person and their position that this text message has come from.

EMAIL

- ✓ Include the school name in the subject heading
- ✓ Have a short but appropriate subject heading (e.g. MacKenzie College Closed Due to Snow)
- ✓ State what they need to know first (what is the issue here and what day are we referring to, e.g. School closed due to snow Tuesday 1st June)
- ✓ Outline what action is required from the parent (e.g. please do not enter school grounds as snow has caused damage to buildings)
- ✓ Sign-off with the person and their position that this email has come from.

TEMPLATES

EMAIL

SUBJECT HEADING

Include school name and keep it short (about 28-39 characters)

GREETING

Personalise this to who you are sending it to

MAIN POINT

State clearly the purpose of the message

ACTION

Outline actions to take (if any)

MORE INFORMATION: Direct the parent to where they can find more information. If you are including a link, hyperlink it rather than sending the full URL (this avoids spam filters)



TEMPLATES

MOBILE

MAIN POINT

Include the school acronym and state clearly the purpose of the message

ACTION

Outline actions to take (if any)

EXTRA INFORMATION

Direct them to a website or contact for more information

SIGN OFF

With the person this message has come from and their position



KEYWORDS

Blunt or poorly worded messages won't get the response you expect. Here are some helpful terms to use and some to avoid when formulating your messages.

GOOD TERMS:

- Please
- Dear
- Regards
- First names
- Do

BAD TERMS:

- Now
- Your child
- Don't