



State Economic Development Staff Develops Business Relationships Via Email

Like many organizations with operational demands to cut costs and build business, the New Hampshire State International Trade Resource Center turned to email as a cost effective way to communicate and stay in contact with their customers.

Being able to do more with what they have, the ITRC is now growing their customer list at nearly a 25% annual rate, using PoliteMail to extend Microsoft Outlook's capabilities to manage lists, send targeted, personalized 1:1 messages, and track results. The new software was economical, did not require training expenses, and has improved user productivity by more than five hours per week.

The Problem

Anka Jacobs, Executive Training Manager for Southern NH University at the International Trade Resource Center, needed to send out an important email alerting 2,000 clients to an upcoming increase in punitive duties to the European Union on select product categories. The ITRC office works with New Hampshire companies exporting products in and out of the US, so the news was important to get delivered.

“Before, it seemed like half of our email was undeliverable for some reason”

Prior to using PoliteMail for Outlook, Anka and others in the office were using Outlook for their email marketing, email newsletters, and announcements—with dismal results. Without a budget for monthly email services or the time to learn a new email program, the division was asked to use the email application they already had in place—Microsoft Outlook.

“We had to break up our list into chunks of 250, and basically BCC groups of people” said Anka. “It took time to cut and paste from the Excel file. We just didn't have the time or resources to individually send to each of our members and then do follow up.”

A lot of those emails bounced, filling Anka's Inbox with undeliverable notices. ““Here we have this great list of people who want and need information from us, yet we couldn't effectively get it to them. We suspected it was the way we were sending—but we couldn't do anything about it.” So Anka and her team continued their BCC e-mails, and information continued to go undelivered.

“I'd get a phone call from someone asking a question about a particular change to an export law,” said Anka, “and we would've just sent out an email announcing a seminar focused on that particular issue. But when I'd ask if she'd received the e-mail announcement, more times than not she'd say she didn't get anything from us. It was so frustrating.”

Growing the Mailing List with Communication Preferences

“We’re not the most technically savvy group, but we all know how to use Office, so we managed our mailing list in an Excel file” Anka explained. “It worked, but it was difficult to keep it up-to-date. If I changed or added information, I had to send the file to Karen, and if she had updated her file too, then we gave them both to our assistant to figure out the changes.”

Now the mailing list is always up-to-date and available to all users within the division, right within Outlook. “We just add and change the contact available to everyone. When I added someone new this morning, they received the newsletter Karen sent out this afternoon. That’s how it should work.”

“Our list had been stagnant for years,” continued Anka. But now Anka's email list is growing—at a rate of 23.5% a year—thanks in part to PoliteMail's CAN-SPAM compliance and communication preference technologies. “Before, we had to deal with opt-outs automatically – and we definitely weren't compliant with the current email legislation.”

Now however, all the compliance, opt-out and communication preferences are taken care of. “In the footer of every email we send is a link to our communication preferences page—this is something PoliteMail manages automatically, so we never have to worry about it.”

Now ITRC clients are able to update their own contact information; nearly 1% have done so. Those are names that would otherwise have become undeliverable. Having control over the opt-in and opt-out process, and being able to update their own information puts people more at ease with being on a list. Anka explains, “When our clients know they can safely opt-out at any time, they seem more likely to sign-on and stay on our list. So the compliance and preferences features seem to be an important factor in helping us grow our list.”

Improving Follow-Up

As an educational resource, the ITRC holds seminars, classes and hosts speaking engagement several times per month. “Calling 2000 clients regarding every event is simply not possible for us,” explains Anka.

With more and more businesses using email as their primary communication tool, it’s important to be able to track response. This can be beneficial to both sender and recipient, as follow-up activity can focus on those people who express interest by their click behavior. For companies making follow-up calls, their time is better used by follow up with specific types of recipients—whether they be just those people who opened the message and clicked for more information, or the people who didn't open the e-mail at all.

“Now with PoliteMail, I can target based upon interest. I can see who has opened, clicked, forwarded or responded to my messages. If it’s a critical announcement,

PoliteMail allows me to grab the unopened segment of the list, and resend it. I can also send timely follow-up to just the people that expressed interest in a specific seminar topic.”

Personalization, Improved Delivery

Anka began using an early release version of PoliteMail in January, 2006—and her whole email marketing approach changed overnight.

“When I found PoliteMail, I could finally make Outlook do the things I wished it would do all along. The coolest thing is to personalize every message with the person’s name, and automatically sending to the whole list as a series of individual messages—essentially an automatic mail merge—so everyone gets their own copy, and it looks as if I took the time to send it just to them.”

At first their IT administrator was skeptical. But PoliteMail efficiently stores only one copy of the message in the user’s sent items folder, no matter what the list size. And the email goes out through the state’s authentic email server. “Our IT guy liked the fact that he didn’t need to do anything with the mail server, and that the data was securely stored on PoliteMail’s database server and fed into Outlook” explains Anka.

Undeliverable emails are no longer a worry. “On that first mailing, our percentage of undeliverable messages dropped to less than 1%, and overall since January it’s just 1.6%.” Improved delivery and a sharp reduction in bounces and filtering means the ITRC’s messages are getting through.

Productivity Up, Costs Down

The time Anka and her team has to spend on letting their clients know about relevant issues also declined radically. “Mailings that used to take me hours—and then to add insult to injury, never got delivered—now take 10 minutes, and actually arrive at their intended destination,” said Anka.

Email analytics are something that Anka focuses some of her newly found extra time on. “Finally, I can see what is happening to all the email we send, the numbers come right into Outlook. It was absolutely amazing to see response numbers come in,” Anka says.

Being able to see a client’s email activity history provides a way to improve the client relationship. When a client calls, or replies to a message, one click displays all the messages to and from that person, what they received, what they opened or didn’t, what attachments they’ve read, if they visited the links, forwarded the message or replied. “This allows me to know what to talk about, what they are interested in, and sometimes even why they may be calling me. And that makes for better service,” explains Anka.

Better Communication Produces More Business

PoliteMail for Outlook has had a big impact on ITRC, outside of just email response. “Our seminar attendance—a great place for our staff to reach many members at once—

has gone up by nearly 30%. We've also seen an increase in press coverage, probably because journalists actually receive our emails—and they're impressed by personalization just to them, rather than an announcement that has obviously been blasted out to a list.”

“PoliteMail has basically changed the entire way we communicate with our clients,” Anka admitted. “Email is working for us now. It provides me with a way to have a much bigger outreach and impact from my desktop, with little cost. The fact that I can do all of this from Outlook—a program I've been using for years—just made the whole process that much easier,” she concluded. “Our email now looks more professional, and gets delivered. Our open rate tops 61%.”

Contact Information

The ITRC is a NH State facility under the administration of the New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development.

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