

Scottish Accessible Information Forum

Good practice for emails

1. Use plain text emails when sending emails.
2. The email address that you send from should be relevant.

The 'From' field will display your email address. People tend to check if they recognise the sender before even reading the subject line.

3. The email address that you send from should accept replies.

In the subject line

4. Always write a relevant subject line.

A good subject line describes the meaning of the email. It should be between 20 – 50 characters long. A subject line with more than 80 characters will be cut off in most email clients.

5. Don't use all caps (ALL CAPS), multiple exclamation marks (!!!!), pound (£) and dollar signs (\$), or multiples of any character. This is likely to get your email classified as spam.

Always include

6. Your organisation's name, address and phone number. This provides people with alternative ways to contact you.
 - If you are a Plc or a Ltd Company you should also include:
 - a) Your company registration number.
 - b) Your place of registration (e.g. Scotland, England or Wales).
 - c) Your registered office address.

If you are a private or public limited company (Plc) or a Limited (Ltd) Liability Partnership the Companies Act 1985 requires your business emails to include these details in legible characters.

These details are not required for sole traders or standard partnerships. However, it is considered good practice to always include your name, address and phone number.

7. Include your charity registration number and country of registration if you are a charity.

You can include

8. A confidentiality notice.

For example:

- Email confidentiality notice -

This message is private and confidential. If you have received this message in error, please notify us and remove it from your system.

9. A request to add your email address to their address book, i.e. white list your emails.

When you write your email message

10. Use plain language; avoid jargon.

11. Keep the line length to a maximum of 65 characters.

For example:

'Email software has a nasty habit of breaking up lines of text in inconvenient places. As a result your carefully written email can appear like this.'

12. Use a sans serif font that is easy to read.
13. Use font size 12 as a minimum.
14. Use only left justification of text.
15. Do not use bold, italics or underlining to set the tone or add emphasis to your text. Choose words or phrases such as 'please note' instead.
16. Do not write using all capital letters. This is generally harder to read than lower case letters. This applies to the title, headings and the body text.
17. Use a hyphen or write a joined up word separately; Opt-in, instead of optin.
18. Use good punctuation:
 - a full stop at the end of paragraphs,
 - a full stop or a colon at the end of list items.

Links in the message

19. Use lower caps in links. Capitalised letters may stop the link from working.
20. Avoid breaking links over two lines if you can.

This can be difficult if you stick to the maximum 65 characters in each line. Often a long URL will exceed this and may be broken into two lines (just like long lines of text) by an email client.

For example:

[http://www.saifscotland.org.uk/publications/publicat.htm#
GuidetoUserledReviews.](http://www.saifscotland.org.uk/publications/publicat.htm#GuidetoUserledReviews)

The usual result is that only the first line of the URL is clickable. This will take the user to the wrong address and may show a page error.

21. Write URLs in full to increase the chances of long URL's being clickable.

For example:

<http://www.yourdomain.com/> and not www.yourdomain.com.

22. Put the URL on a new line and continue any text on the next line after the URL.

For example:

Please look through our new training programs and seminars at:

<http://www.saifscotland.org.uk/training/index.htm>

and let us know if there is something you would like to add.

Characters

23. Use only the following 'safe' characters, in your plain-text emails:

- a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
- A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
- " % & ' () * + , - . / : ; < = > ? _

Different email clients handle "odd" characters, (characters outside the standard ASCII character set) differently.

Group emails

24. Use the Blank Carbon Copy field (BCC) for all the recipients' email addresses.

You should never forward people's personal data (in this case email addresses) to others without their specific agreement. See the 'Opt-in' information. This is regulated by the Data Protection Act.

Newsletters – Bulk emails

A plain text newsletter is usually easier to read via assistive technology than a HTML version. However, some people prefer to read a well coded HTML newsletter or the same content on a webpage which is coded to current accessibility standards and guide lines.

25. Only send information and newsletters to people who have actively said yes to receive it (Opt In).

26. Clearly display instructions about how to opt out from your mailing list.

Include valid easy-to-use unsubscribe instructions in every message. You must make it easy for your recipients to remove themselves from your list. Do not hide instructions in tiny print or ask users to enter passwords or confirm their request.

27. Make it easy to opt out:

- use a one or two step process at most,
- test it regularly to make sure it works.

If someone fails to unsubscribe after using your procedure the next email you send can be reported as spam.

28. Always include information regarding your privacy policy and cookie policy, or clear links to these policies.

The privacy policy should give clear and comprehensive information about:

- How you treat the email addresses and demographic information that members provide you with.

Whether you use it internally only, share it with selected affiliates, or offer it to brokers. Always let people know what they can expect.

- How personal information is used.
- Information about cookie, clear gif, web beacon or other tracking or data storing devices that are used within the email, and an opportunity for the recipient to refuse its use.

Cookies can be used to store information input from users. This can have a legitimate use, for example storing user preferences, shorter versions of log in procedures or storing details in a form that the user will come back to. They can also be used for tracking user behaviour, which websites they go to etc.

Rename the Privacy Policy link as "Privacy Policy and Policy for Use of Cookies" in order to raise the visibility of the use of (or non-use of) Cookies.

29. Consider using The Email Newsletter (TEN) Standards for plain text newsletters.

30. Use a simple text editor when writing text only newsletters. Email clients can show any character you can create without putting in extra 'surprises' which can be displayed and so, when the email is received.

More advanced word processing software often inserts "odd" characters, such as the trailing dot character or smart quotes, which can cause display problems in some email software.

31. Always include a plain text newsletter in a HTML newsletter.

This should contain the same information in the HTML newsletter. Email clients can choose to display the version they prefer.

32. Include a link to a webpage with the same content as the HTML newsletter.

For example:

If you cannot see this email properly, follow this link:
[HTML Version of SAIF Newsletter no 12](#)

The webpage should be created according to current accessibility standards and good practice for websites.

Words and phrases to avoid (staying clear of spam filters)

Free, Act Now, All New, 50% Off, Call Now, Subscribe Now, Earn Money, Discount, Double Your Income, You're A Winner!, Million Dollars, Opportunity, Compare, Removes, Collect, Amazing, Cash Bonus, Promise You, Credit Loans, As Seen On, Buy Direct, Get Paid, Order Now, Please Read, Don't Delete, Time Limited, While Supplies Last, Why Pay More, Special Promotion, Information You Requested, Stop, No Cost, Satisfaction Guaranteed, Serious Cash, Search Engine Listings, Join Millions, No Fees, Save Up To, All Natural, You've Been Selected

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