

Tenant Satisfaction Survey Response: Subject Lines and Day of Week

Maximizing response to workplace emails by varying send day, send time, and subject lines

Agency Objective. Determine what day of week and time of day is best to send emails to increase email opens and clicks; determine what subject line content and punctuation increases opens and clicks.

Background. The General Service Administration (GSA)'s Public Buildings Service (PBS) owns or leases over 9,600 assets, with more than 370 million square feet of space for over a million Federal employees.⁸⁰ Each year, PBS sends Federal employees the Tenant Satisfaction Survey (TSS), the results of which help determine Federal facilities strategy. In 2014, PBS collaborated with the Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES) to simplify the survey and test different messages for launching the survey, with the goal of increasing response rates. After scaling the successful messages from the TSS launch pilot (see above, "TSS Response: Calendar Invite"), and overwhelming the survey contractor's website with a full launch (see above, "TSS Response: Time of Day"), PBS and OES spaced out the remaining announcement population into three batches of roughly 23,000 recipients each day for seven business days.

Methods. An announcement email was sent to two randomly assigned groups of approximately 11,500 Federal employees three times a day for a week—at 9:00 a.m., 12:30 p.m., and 4:00 p.m. (all send times Eastern). In addition to time-of-day and day-of-week variation, PBS and OES varied aspects of the subject line, testing paired permutations of the following against each other: "2014 Tenant Satisfaction Survey," "2014 Tenant Satisfaction Survey – Take it Today" and "2014 Tenant Satisfaction Survey – Please Take it Today."

The emails also varied the use of an exclamation point on each of those subject lines. Data on recipient agency and location came from Office of Personnel Management (OPM) records. GovDelivery, the email service, provided data on email open and click rates.

Results. Controlling for state and agency effects, the highest likelihoods of opens and clicks came on Tuesdays (1.8 percentage points higher open, 1.2 percentage points higher click) and Wednesdays (1.9 percentage points higher open, 1.0 percentage point higher click), relative to Fridays ($p < 0.01$). Relative to mornings, lunchtime sends had higher clicks (0.3 percentage point) and opens (0.3 percentage point) ($p < 0.01$). And relative to the lowest performing subject line ("2014 Tenant Satisfaction Survey – Take it Today") adding "Please" led to 1.0 percentage point more clicks and 0.5 percentage point more opens ($p < 0.01$); adding an exclamation point led to 0.8 percentage point fewer opens, and 0.5 percentage point fewer clicks ($p < 0.01$).

Conclusions. The findings from these TSS tests—that sending emails near lunchtime on Tuesdays and Wednesdays resulted in higher responses; and that saying "please" in subject lines helped while adding an exclamation point hurt—may not hold in every government or workplace email context. However, they provide meaningful evidence on responses to workplace requests. Perhaps more significantly, the methods and practices of testing different approaches to workplace email requests are broadly applicable across government.

⁸⁰Background information on the Public Buildings Service is available here: gsa.gov/portal/content/104444