

Trust the Data:
The Growth of
Email Usage During
COVID-19 & the
Impact on Internal
Communications

A CASE STUDY



How the Nimble OhioHealth Communications Team utilized email Analytics to Transform Employee Email Communication During Covid-19

OhioHealth is a not-for-profit system of hospitals and healthcare providers located in Columbus, Ohio, and surrounding areas. OhioHealth associates are on the front-lines of the pandemic, providing life-saving care to patients. They are a family of 35,000 associates, physicians, and volunteers, and a network of 12 hospitals, 200+ ambulatory sites, hospice, home health, medical equipment, and other health services spanning 47 Ohio counties.

The communications team is responsible for delivering timely, effective communication to their frontline healthcare workers, and when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, it accelerated the need for accurate, timely communication.

Prior to using PoliteMail, OhioHealth's communications team operated on gut feelings and anecdotal evidence, resulting in communication that wasn't necessarily effective for their audiences. After engaging with PoliteMail, the OhioHealth communications team was able to deliver the right message, backed by data and analytics, making their Covid-19 communications a massive success.



We're literally in PoliteMail's dashboard every hour. It gave us so much critical information, and was the spine of our communications strategy.



Here's how OhioHealth utilized PoliteMail:

Personalized, effective, up-to-date communication to the right audience at the right time.



When the Covid-19 pandemic began in March 2020, OhioHealth's typical communication plans went out the window, and timely communication with their clinical audiences became a top priority.

Through PoliteMail analytics, the communications team became more agile and informed and adjusted their communication style to a more refined approach, which included:

Personalized daily, relevant messages to each segmented audience.

OhioHealth used PoliteMail to segment their email lists by the relevant clinical and leadership audiences, not simply by locations. With so many different audiences, it was critical for busy frontline workers to receive the right information in bite-sized, easy-to-read emails.

Interestingly, OhioHealth analyzed the Politemail data for each specific audience, and made changes differently based on the engagement trends for that audience. Outside of certain all-staff email broadcasts, OhioHeath data moved them away from "one-size fits all" communication.

Increasing the frequency of communication to frontline workers.

Due to the rapid changes of CDC guidelines, governor's orders, and organization policies, daily emails were needed to keep up with the information. At the beginning of the pandemic, the data showed daily emails were preferred, then the team shifted the strategy as the data showed a drop off in readership. These dailies were a significant increase from pre-Covid bi-weekly and monthly messages.

Making the intranet the source of truth.

Based on which links were being clicked, OhioHealth pushed their intranet as the source of truth for information. It catapulted the need to make sure the information on the intranet was always up to date and could be referenced at any time.



The metrics amplified trust with the executive team. Communication decisions were made and approved faster.

Through PoliteMail, the communications team was able to access data previously inaccessible by their email program. This included understanding:

- Open rates
- Time spent reading messages
- Click-through rates
- The best time to send engaging messages





OhioHealth used this information to communicate to the executive team on how effective (or ineffective) the communication was and provided a recommendation on possible next steps.

This included analyzing the effectiveness of:

- CEO video messages
- Management communication
- Message effectiveness and trends for each audience

Because data was used as the center of presentations, the executive team put its full trust in the communications team and halted the requirement to get each message pre-approved prior to sending.

Getting buy-in and trust from the executive team on a more efficient process was an amazing thing for us. It allowed us to move quickly, and we let the data be our guiding principle. It truly was the data that allowed us to take this next step in executive trust."

Pivoted communication in real-time based on analytics.



We asked ourselves, how do we maximize their attention to our emails? The data was crucial for us to understand everything from length of emails, subject lines, time of day, day of the week, and number of links. We made every decision with confidence it was the right choice.



The analytics allowed OhioHealth to make more effective decisions every single hour and allowed them to make new decisions with confidence. Here are a few things they learned:

Adapted communication frequency based on readership and engagement analytics.

PoliteMail’s data showed that engagement and readership for their daily emails were declining as Covid-19 went on into its fourth month. Based on this data, communications were moved from daily to twice a week, which immediately showed improved readership and engagement.

Friday afternoon emails had a low engagement rate.

The data showed that Friday emails had low engagement rates and that they could stop sending that email altogether with no impact on their communication effectiveness.

OhioHealth exceeded engagement benchmarks compared to other healthcare providers.

Because they used data to make modifications, OhioHealth improved their engagement significantly and exceeded the email benchmarks for healthcare organizations.



Average Open and Read Rate for all COVID-19 Emails March 1– July 10

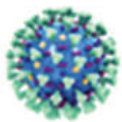
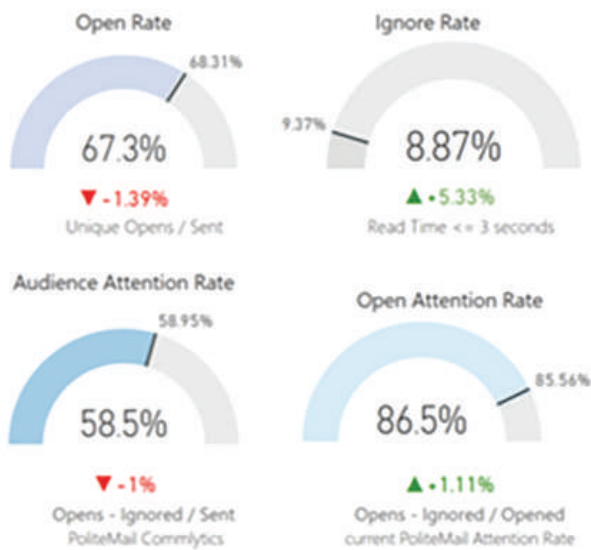
(n = 602)

| Metric | COVID-19 Emails | Healthcare Benchmark |
|--------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Average Open Rate | 70% | 67% |
| *Average Read Rate | 47% | 38% |

**percentage of recipients who had the email open for at least 30% of the emails calculated read time.*

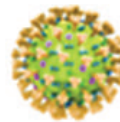
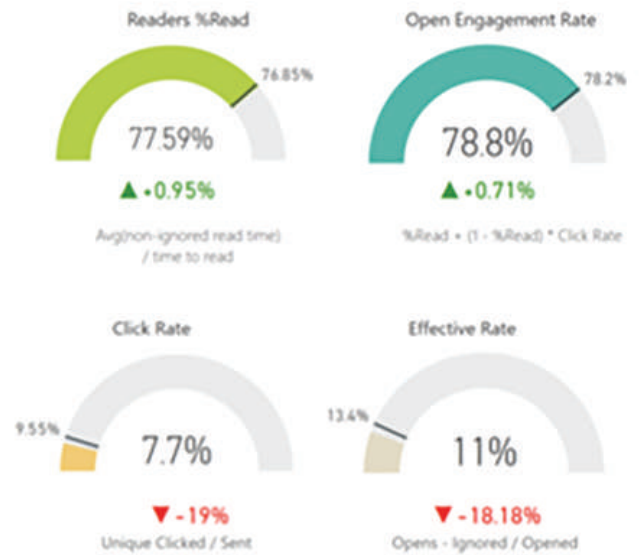
We’re above the healthcare benchmark for open and read rate!

Comparison of COVID Reach and Attention Metrics



Volume up + Attention rates stable = Employees can handle more email

Comparison of COVID Engagement Metrics



Reading slightly more, clicking significantly less

OhioHealth's communications teams enabled their critical workforce to make the right decisions at the right time.

In the end, the frontline workers and their patients benefited from a data-driven communication strategy. They were educated and informed.

There are a few more things OhioHealth learned from this process:

They can be bold with their messaging.

They would have never made some of their decisions without the data to back it up. This allowed the OhioHealth communications team to be a little bolder with the messaging, including subject lines. Wording that normally would never get approved was supported by data.



They prioritized what type of information is “need-to-know” vs. “nice-to-know.”

Prior to PoliteMail, it was impossible to tell what information was nice-to-know or critical need-to-know. By analyzing engagement and link clicks, especially for Covid-19 communications, the OhioHealth team was able to get critical information to the right resources in a timely manner.

They couldn't have done it without PoliteMail.



We would have probably pivoted based on gut instincts, and knowing what we know now, our gut wouldn't have been right. We would still be sending emails every day, and we would only know information based on intranet clicks and video views.



If your communication team is wondering how to improve the email communications channel, PoliteMail can help you achieve similar results to OhioHealth. Please contact us to schedule a live product demonstration.

politemail.com/demo

