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I Didn't Know  
My Library  
Had That!

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A GUIDE TO  
**Increasing Usage  
of Library Resources**

NoveList®

# Introduction

Your library spends a significant percentage of its budget on databases and other online services that your community needs but perhaps doesn't use as often as you'd like. In fact, we hear from you (and libraries just like yours) that your patrons are surprised to learn their library offers e-books, e-magazines, online learning, and more.

**So, what can you do to engage those patrons?**



We ran a pilot project with libraries from the U.S. and Canada, big and small, rural, and urban, to see if online resource usage would increase if it were promoted in a new way, in a way that mattered to today's cardholders of all demographics and ages, regardless of how often they visit the library.

We knew that with the right messaging, compelling graphics, and solid services to promote database usage would increase, but would it be enough to excite cardholders who haven't stepped into a library in years? The other equally important question was: could all libraries do this kind of promotion, regardless of size or staff expertise?

**The answer was a resounding YES!**

In this guide, we'll share the steps your library can take to engage cardholders by strategically promoting your databases and online services. We'll show you what worked well for libraries and why, so that you can adapt these steps to your community. We'll also look at how to turn interest into engagement and offer tips for keeping the excitement high, long after the campaign has ended.

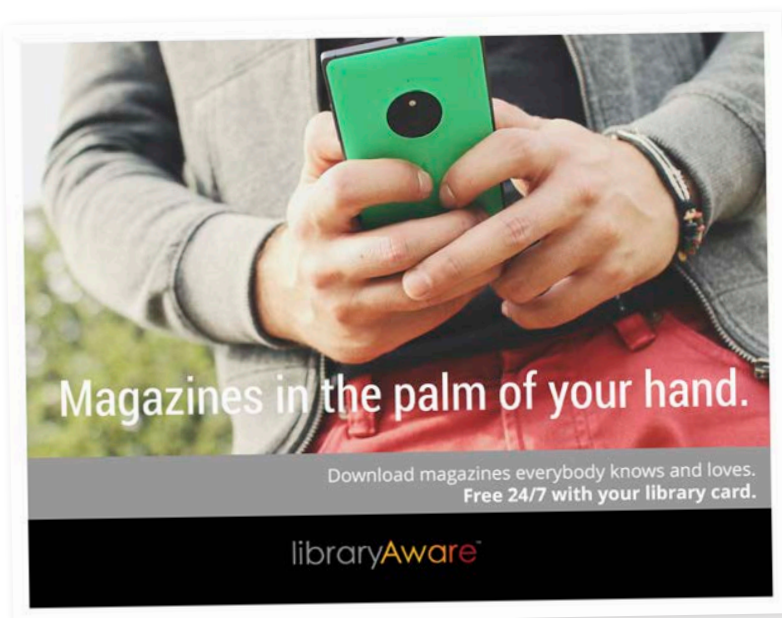
# Summary

## Here's how we did it — The Step-by-Step

- 1 We created a series of email templates. Requirement: they had to be easy to modify.
- 2 We focused on benefits-driven messaging. Critical: We wanted to grab patrons' attention with services that offered significant impact on their lives.
- 3 We highlighted one database or service with relevant artwork, text, and a link to the resources page on the library's website.
- 4 We sent an average of six emails: one welcome email and five monthly database emails.

## Types of Campaigns to Consider

ONLINE COLLECTIONS	COURSES FOR BUSINESS	COURSES FOR TEST PREP	COURSES FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
Audiobooks E-books Streaming Videos Online Magazines	Business Skills Business Start-Up Sales & Marketing Tech Training	Career Exams College Readiness College Exams GRE/GED	Personal Skills Language Learning Genealogy Homework Help

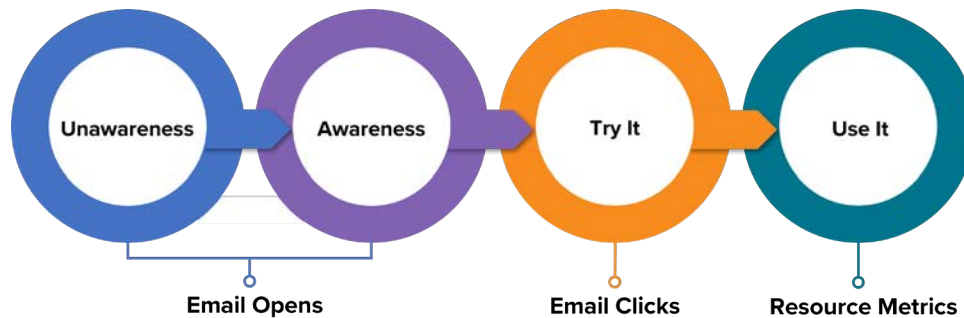


A big picture makes an emotional statement. A link to the resources on their website gives libraries important click-through information to measure engagement.

# How did it go?

Using targeted, well-designed emails to increase usage was an outstanding success. Libraries saw substantial increases in the usage of online resources they had previously struggled to get patrons to use. And their metrics compared to seasoned marketers.

The first goal was to take patrons from unawareness to awareness, measured by email opens. Second, we wanted to move from awareness to trial, measured by email clicks. The final step was usage, measured by usage of the resource being promoted.



The average open rate across all libraries was 29.37%, outperforming the average open rate for emails from non-profits which hovers in the mid-20%. Across all libraries, the total number of clicks were 86,446.

Most important of all, when libraries tracked actual usage of online resources, they saw double- and triple-digit increases.

For example, two libraries used our campaign to promote Flipster digital magazines and saw triple-digit increases in downloads!

In total, the libraries created awareness about their online resources in over 770,000 cardholders. That's amazing considering that many of these libraries had never even thought to promote their online resources through email.

The screenshot shows an email header with the MCL logo and "NextReads Find your next read". Below is a photo of a woman reading a tablet with the text "Magazines in the palm of your hand." and "Popular magazines, free with your library card." Below that is a grid of magazine covers on a tablet. To the right is a Flipster logo and text: "The magazines you know and love, available digitally." Below that is the text: "Download the magazines everybody knows and loves. We offer you access to your favorite digital magazines with a free service called Flipster. It's easy and free with your library card. And best of all there are never any fines! Get started now."

Libraries increased usage of Flipster by promoting "Magazines in the palm of your hand." Mercer County Library jumped from 750 downloads per month to 2,700 per month and Sarasota County Libraries saw a 388% increase in downloads.



"We essentially doubled our usage stats for that resource from previous months' averages."

**ROSS FUQUA,  
WASHINGTON COUNTY  
COOPERATIVE LIBRARY SERVICES**

"Every single resource so far has sky rocketed after the email."

**SARAH MCDONALD,  
OXFORD COUNTY LIBRARY**



## Here's how you can do it too!

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- **Choose an email service if you don't have one already.** See “10 Questions to Ask When Choosing an Email Marketing Service” below.
- **Create your email list.** If you pull a list from your ILS, make sure it only includes active cardholders.
- **Select the resources that are of highest value to your patrons.**  
What is popular in your community? A good tip is to look for services they might be paying for already, like audiobooks or e-magazines.
- **Let staff know what services you will be promoting in the coming months and provide information about each so they'll be able to answer questions.** Consider tying in a program related to the service, such as a Genealogy 101 class during the same month you send an email about your online ancestry resource.
- **Design your email template (if your email service doesn't provide one).** We suggest promoting only one service in each email. Make sure you include a link to the online resource and test the link—you don't want to send people to a broken link!
- **Keep it fresh.** Schedule a different email to go out each month.
- **Check your statistics about a week after your email is sent to give enough people a chance to open it.** Aim for open rates of 20% to 27% and click through rates of 2.5% to 4%. To get your click through rate, divide the number of clicks by total emails sent minus bounces.
- **Make adjustments if needed.** Is your open rate lower than you hoped? It could be that your subject line wasn't enticing. Not enough clicks? Take a hard look at your content. If people are opening your email but not clicking on the link to your resource, that means they weren't compelled to try it out. Why not?
- **Check usage of your database.** Many libraries saw huge spikes in usage at first, then it dropped back down a bit, but stayed higher than the initial level for several months. This is when you want to offer programs related to that database. Use printed flyers, website widgets, and social media posts to keep the interest going.
- **Dive deeper into the database or service to keep your promotions going.** Now that patrons have been introduced to your services, pick one to really drive engagement. For example, if you promoted the e-magazine service Flipster, next time focus on different interests covered by magazines. The first month, point out that Flipster has great magazines for shade-tree mechanics and car lovers. The next month, promote magazines that foodies will love.



# 10 Questions to Ask When Choosing an Email Marketing Service

- 1 What is the pricing model and what are the subscriber list limits? Some services offer free accounts but there's a limit on the number of subscribers. Some offer paid accounts with fees based on the size of your subscriber list; others charge based on how often you want to send an email.
- 2 What metrics or reports are offered and how easy is it to access the information? At a minimum, you'll want to see your open rates, number of clicks, and which links are clicked. It's also beneficial to get a list of recipients that opened your email, so you know who's reading it; a bounce list; and a list of those who unsubscribed.
- 3 Is there an easy way for recipients to unsubscribe? Make sure your patron-facing emails are compliant with local email regulations.
- 4 Do they validate the emails you upload? This is critical if you're being charged by the number of emails sent; you want invalid addresses to be culled out.
- 5 Is it easy to make interest groups for audience segmentation? Is there any limit to the number of groups you can create? You want to have the flexibility you need to target audiences.
- 6 Do they provide templates and access to copyright-free images and professionally designed graphics? Do those elements work well for libraries? It can take time and some design expertise to convert a small business announcement into an email promoting genealogy or storytime events.
- 7 Do they provide book and A/V jackets, title and author information, and annotations? Are you easily able to build links to items in your catalog?
- 8 What kind of branding will they provide for your library? Will you need to add in your logo and library contact details every time you create an email? Will they help you with custom branding?
- 9 What level of customer service do they offer? If you need design help, do they charge for it? What if you get stuck while you're creating the email; do they offer live chat and screen sharing?
- 10 Do they create an opt-in page for you that automatically updates every time you add a new subscriber group?



## BONUS POINTS:

Does their platform also provide a way to make matching print materials like bookmarks and event flyers, social media posts and widgets for your website?

# 8 Tips for Success with Email



**1 Content matters most of all.** Focus on creating targeted, relevant and impactful emails for your audience with a clear call to action and links to resources or more information. Your results will show the value of sending content that matters to your audience.

**2 Benefit-driven emails are the most effective.** Don't promote a service or database; promote that you have the answer to your patrons' needs.

“We had three calls within an hour after our last email went out. It was a good thing staff was able to help patrons get started with that particular resource!”

MARDI DURHAM, IREDELL COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

**3 Behind every successful library email campaign is a well-informed staff.** Make sure they know about the resources and where to find it on your website. You may have patrons come to your library who saw the email and want to know more about the service—be ready for them.

“Thanks to this email, the genealogy class was full. The database had a 420% increase in page views and an 800% increase in the number of user sessions over the prior year.”

MARY WALLACE MOORE, SMYRNA PUBLIC LIBRARY

**4 Take advantage of cross-promotion.** Offer related programming at the library—just make sure it's relevant to the database or service you're promoting.



**5 Open rates matter, but trends matter more.** After a few emails, look at your open rate trend—is it going up, down, or staying steady? One email might hit on topics that resonate with your customers better than another. Your timing on one email might work better than another. There might be things happening in your community that either draw people into the resource you're offering at the time, or that keeps them from clicking. Watch for trends over time and use your metrics to inform your strategy going forward, adjusting as needed.

**6 Keep them coming back for more.** An immediate boost in interest in the database you promoted is great, but to keep people coming back to use it, include other strategies to sustain patron engagement.

**7 Use an email provider that includes a clear and easy way for patrons to unsubscribe.** You don't want your library to be marked as a spammer. Plus, it's just the right thing to do.

**8 Limit your emails to no more than two per month and keep them to only one topic per email.** This isn't a monthly newsletter; it's a quick bulletin to let patrons know you have a fantastic free service that they'll only find at their library.

## What if my library doesn't have an email list?

Start one!

The best way is to ask for emails when people sign up for a library card. Include a line something like, "Please provide your email address for news and updates from the library."

In the meantime, ask for emails when patrons renew their cards, at outreach events, and at the checkout desk (update their account on the spot with their email address).

## Our library has a policy against emailing patrons except for account updates and holds notices. How can we still try this?

Send out a single opt-in email? (Many libraries have tried this with great results!)

Here's how to do it. Your first email goes to everyone on your list. Be sure to include a statement that tells patrons you would like to send them emails each month with information about library services you think they'll find valuable, but you'd like their permission. Include a large button that says SUBSCRIBE and tell readers to click that button. The list you build from those who click subscribe is now your opt-in list, and you have their consent to receive emails about programs and services.

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“We had never done a mass email campaign at all. We've had an incredible response, it's been really wonderful. And the unsubscribe rate was very low. It was really amazing.”

**JESSICA FRAMSON,  
HUNTINGTON BEACH  
PUBLIC LIBRARY**

“We thought that we might receive complaints about the emails. The opposite was true. We received no complaints, and we received a handful of emails which basically stated, “Thanks for letting us know” or “I had no idea ...”

**RHONDA MASSIE,  
BLOOMINGTON LIBRARY**

## The results are remarkable, but are they sustainable?

Yes!

Your first goal should be to raise awareness and put to rest the comments of “I didn't know my library had that.”. Think of this as an ongoing process that will need to be repeated over time.

Maintaining long-term usage can be a challenge. However, libraries report that their usage stats remain higher than before running an email campaign. For example, at six months after sending their email promoting Flipster, Sarasota County Libraries was still seeing usage rates at 55% above pre-campaign rates.

## Should I send emails to non-cardholders, too?

Many databases require the use of a library card. To avoid frustrating people who cannot access the service, we suggest libraries only send emails to library cardholders. At another time, you could send emails to everyone in your service area to encourage them to sign up for a card, touting the many services and resources available.



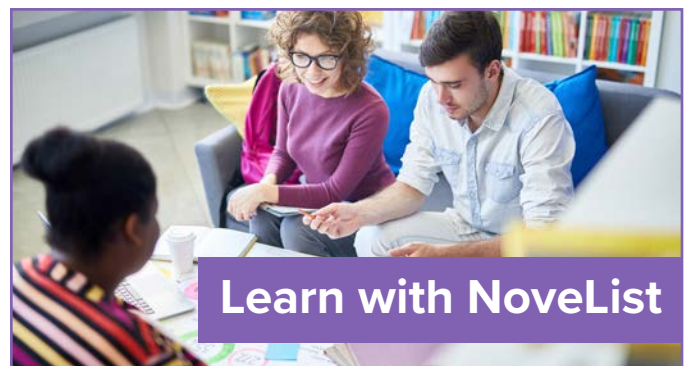
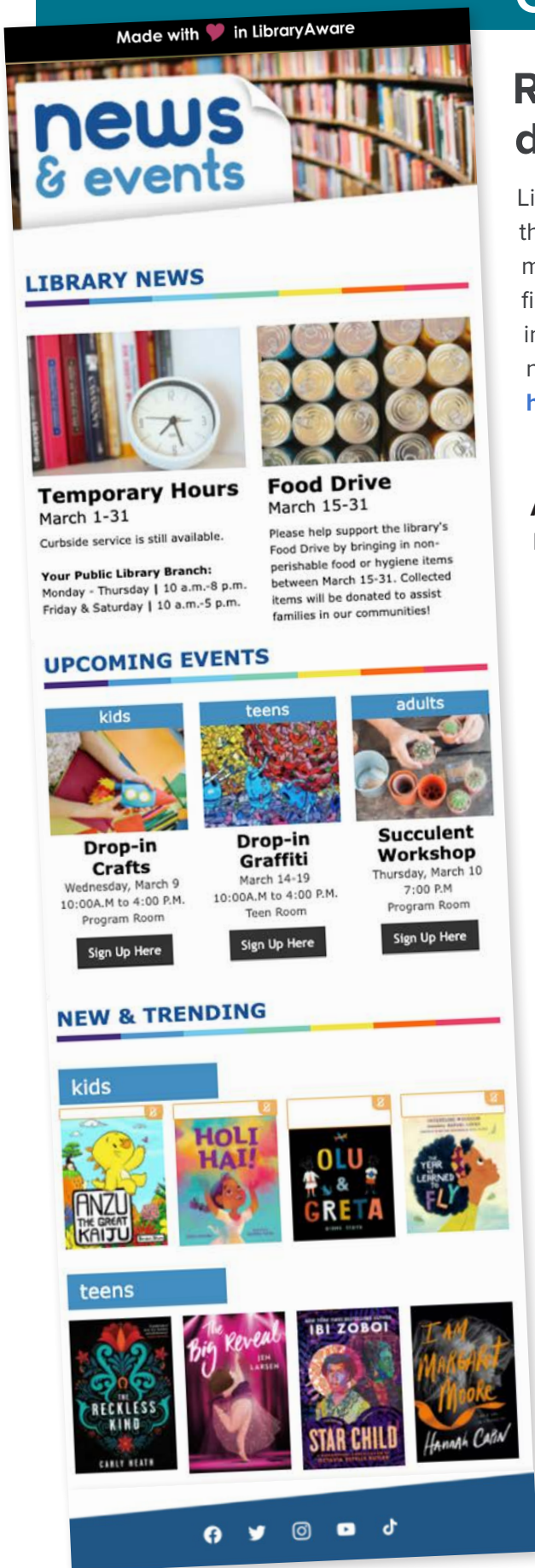
# Conclusion

## Ready to try email marketing to drive engagement at your library?

LibraryAware offers an easy way for libraries to engage cardholders through email as well as social media, event flyers, bookmarks and more. We created LibraryAware especially for libraries, so you'll find thousands of library-specific templates and graphics. It also includes unlimited users and subscribers to meet your growing needs. Ready to see a demo or get a quote? Contact us at <https://www.ebsco.com/novelist/products/libraryaware>

### About NovelList

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