



Report on FFI's Email Recruiting Campaign George Brown, February 2011

The idea of promoting exchanges on a national and global basis is not new. In the early years this was done by mass mailings. The most prominent effort was in 1992 when a postal card was sent to our entire USA membership list inviting applications for a large delegation to visit Moscow on the occasion of the first post-communist May Day celebrations. From that mass-marketing appeal, we enrolled 350 ambassadors who traveled to Moscow in May 1992 on a very significant and successful event. In the days of postal mailings, however, mass mailings were costly, so very little broad promotion was available for individual exchanges. Instead, in the 1990s we developed the "Friendship Flyer" that was sent on a periodic basis to the USA mailing list promoting upcoming exchanges. Due to the cost of mailing and the time limitations, the flyer had only a small impact on exchange recruiting.

Since 2008 FFI has been able to take advantage of the new technologies available through email communications. This began with the new FFI website in 2008, greatly expanded in 2010. We now have a web-based exchange catalog that lists upcoming exchanges that are open to ambassador applications from anywhere in the world. Having the catalog available on the website was the first step. The second was to create a means for bringing this list of exchange opportunities directly to our members. This is done by sending a monthly "catalog update alert" via email to our full email list. This email alert gives a brief statement about 6-8 exchanges, each of which can be accessed in full by clicking on the link.

Based on the success of the catalog updates, in 2010 FFI added a new kind of exchange promotion, the "ED invitation." This is used for global exchanges that are recruited entirely via email marketing (often there is no ambassador ED, just a host ED, like we did in the past with Friendship Festivals). These are sent out as invitations with the details attached. Some of these have been so successful that the entire exchange has been filled with well qualified applicants within 48 hours.

We are now sending the email alerts to about 6,500 email addresses. This means that over the past two years more than 500,000 emails have been sent. Recognizing that this was a new technique, FFI has monitored the results very carefully. Here is a summary of the results:

1. Almost all the exchanges listed have benefited from inquiries that led to ambassador applications that were accepted on the exchange. In many cases, the exchange would have been cancelled without the catalog applications. Partly as a result of the success of the catalog, less than half as many exchanges were cancelled in 2010 than in 2009.
2. As far as we can tell, there have been no complaints from our members regarding the receipt of the emails. The "opt out" feature works, providing members who wish to be removed from the email marketing an easy way to do so. About 6% elect this option, with 94% glad to receive the email alerts on a regular basis.
3. In addition to the catalog updates and ED invitations, the email marketing list is also being used to circulate the new "e-magazine" from FFI at no cost to the members. This replaces the earlier print magazine that was sold to members and was limited primarily to US subscribers because of the cost of postage.



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4. In Canada, Australia and New Zealand, there are separate national exchange promotions managed by regional volunteer leadership: These are the Canadian exchange website canffex.ca and the Australia and New Zealand e-flyers. These have been successful in presenting members in these countries a national, rather than local, set of exchanges to consider.
5. The quality of ambassadors recruited via email promotions is high. The great majority are club members who provide references, as requested, to the Exchange Director. FFI has developed a new set of guidelines for evaluating ambassador applications from other regions, which can be found in the 2012 Policies.
6. The one problem we have encountered is from club presidents who do not provide us with the email lists but instead try to “forward” some or all of the email alerts to their members. This is not how the system is designed, and it should not be used this way:
 - a. Forwarding is less dependable since it depends on the club president’s availability to send the material on a timely basis.
 - b. Forwarding is much less secure. When sent by FFI the emails are sent through a commercial service dedicated to this kind of email marketing. When sent by “forwarding” by the club president there is less protection from viruses and other hacking.
 - c. If the president forwards the email, and if anyone who receives it “opts out,” then the president’s email address will automatically be deleted from all future FFI communications (until it is re-entered by the club president him- or herself). The system is simply not designed for large-scale forwarding.

When the email marketing campaign was launched two years ago, we understood that some of our leaders would want to wait to see what the results would be. We believe that the past two years provide a very successful test period. Close to 95% of those receiving the email marketing materials elect to continue to receive them, providing strong evidence that this is a positive service for our members. Therefore, all club presidents are encouraged to make sure their members receive these materials on a regular basis by providing their email lists to FFI. As in the past, we continue to assure our members that the lists will not be used for any purposes other than described here.

If you have any questions about this process, please contact Communications Coordinator Jillian Walters (jwalters@thefriendshipforce.org) or FFI President George Brown (gbrown@thefriendshipforce.org).

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