



Smart Communication Software

A high-angle photograph of five students sitting in a circle on a paved outdoor area. They are engaged in collaborative learning, with one student using a laptop, another a tablet, and others with books. The scene is set against a brick wall with some potted plants.

The Language of Learning: How to Optimise Your Education Emails

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Research Partnership

This report has been compiled as part of an Everlytic and BreadCrumbs Linguistics research partnership.

Everlytic is South Africa's largest digital messaging platform, responsible for billions of communication sends every year from the top companies in the country. Everlytic offers the tools to communicate through bulk email, SMS, voice broadcasting, and web push notifications – with data tracking and analytics insights to boost engagement success.

BreadCrumbs Linguistics is an award-winning behavioural communications firm based in South Africa that uses a science-backed approach to communication. BreadCrumbs designs marketing and communication campaigns based on behavioural best practice and publishes research papers across topics of communication and behavioural theory.

Want to explore more?

This is the fourth report in a series of research white papers presenting communication patterns that work best to boost consumer email engagement across various industries.

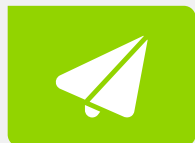
You can download the full series here
Top Tips for Better Email Engagement



Financial Services



Retail



Travel & Tourism



Executive Summary

An increasingly important channel for communicating to parents and students (both prospective and existing) is through email marketing. This is a way for education and training brands to **build trust, boost a sense of authority and thought leadership, and ultimately encourage engagement** with the education brand itself.

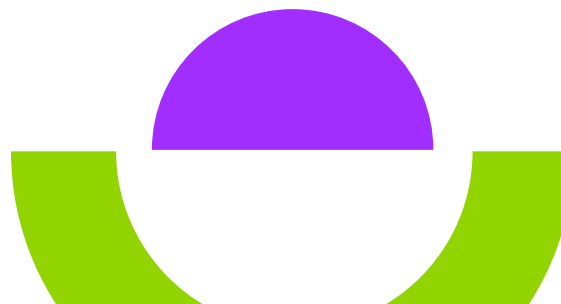
This report evaluated the top mailers sent in South Africa across education topics including admissions, new courses, events, fundraising, and success stories; and offers tips to help promote your institution in the best ways possible.

The research summary highlights **the top 20 education- and training-themed emails** sent from South African brands through the Everlytic platform in 2022. **The data was pulled from 110 238 412 bulk emails** that clients categorised in the education and training industry sent during the year, excluding emails with fewer than 100 recipients. Email ranking was done according to key engagement metrics, including **open rates and click-through rates**.

As part of the dataset, **12 organisations accounted for the top 20 emails sent, taken from a client database of 171 organisations** with the key business function of schooling and education.

Behavioural nudges continue to be one of the best ways to improve sales while still maintaining an end user's freedom of choice. Communications that are framed with behavioural insights in mind benefit from the **close link between language, behaviour, and decision-making**.

Crafting content in ways that are intrinsically linked to how people think and act means you're more likely to persuade: **critical for emails nudging action**.



Top 8 Insights

1. The most successful education mailers were sent **mid-afternoon on Tuesdays and Thursdays** with the best months for education email engagement in **July and September**.
2. The best mailers had a clear focus on nurturing and building a relationship with the reader with strong undertones of shared social identity through **inclusive pronouns**, like “us”, “our”, and “we”.
3. Language of innovation helped to demonstrate the brand was **keeping up with digital technology changes and had a modern approach to learning**, aligned with global trends. This is desirable to students and their parents.
4. Language of discovery, with a theme of exploration and adventure, helped to cue readers to their potential – **what they can hope to achieve in life by being affiliated with the brand communicating to them**. References here were to “new experience and chapters of life” and “embarking on an exciting journey”.
5. Language of quality was used by the top brands to **elevate their ranking as a school or institution of choice** with strong adjective use, like “leading”, “world-class”, and “prestigious” to convey this value.
6. Breadcrumb devices (or navigational cues) including **bold text, bullet points, infographics, and step-by-step tutorial videos** helped readers navigate registration, onboarding, and sign-up processes. Quick, easy access was a priority here.
7. Imagery using students (often dressed in matching uniforms or university-branded gear) helps to **make the reader feel part of a community**: welcomed for being “part of the pack”. This ties into the powerful behavioural bias of social proofing.
8. References to **recognition, celebration, and being proud of the reader** were evident. These made the student and/or parent feel special, for example invitations to events.



Research Methodology

For this report, we analysed the 20 best-performing emails sent in the education and training industry in South Africa in 2022.



The Magic of Metrics

This research takes a deep dive into the **role email marketing plays in building and boosting this industry in South Africa.**

We explored the linguistic patterns that were common across the top-performing mailers **to establish the best practice for brands in this industry going forward.**

Emails were ranked according to **key engagement metrics:** open and click-through rates, and top-performing emails were defined as those with the highest open rates through the Everlytic platform.

It's worth noting that any email sent to fewer than 100 recipients was removed from the dataset to ensure statistical significance.



Open Rate

Email open rate is the percentage of people who open an email out of the total number of people the mailer is sent to. This is calculated by taking the number of people who open the email and dividing it by the number of emails sent that did not bounce (i.e., failed to reach the recipient). This number is then multiplied by 100 to get the email open rate percentage.



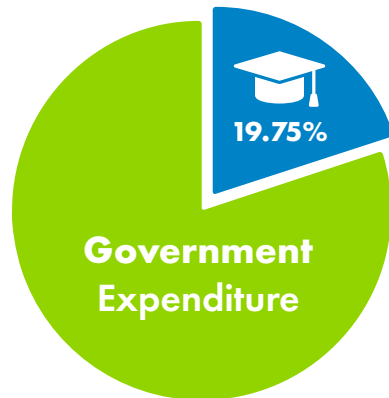
Click-Through Rate

A click-through rate (CTR) for email is the percentage of people who clicked on at least one link in an email message. This is calculated by dividing the total number of people who clicked by the number of delivered emails and multiplying that ratio by 100 to get the email CTR percentage.



Education and Training Trends

The **education sector is a billion-rand industry** in South Africa, with education spending for 2022 up by 1.33% from 2021. This accounts for 19.75% of the total government expenditure across all sectors*.



Recent local trends in education show **the need for innovative change to keep education affordable, accessible, and globally relevant to advance our country.** This comes as rising costs of living pressures affect parents and students across both the public and private sector.

With parents and students paying more for fuel, food, and basic living expenses, **schools, universities, and colleges are facing greater financial pressures.** At the same time, they are racing to make up for lost time with an education gap that will take years to restore to pre-pandemic levels.

Post-Covid-19, we're also seeing more of a move to **hybrid learning methods** with a stronger focus on combining in-person, distance, and online learning options.

Those in education administration recognise that limited staffing and budgets mean **marketing and sales communications are critical to ensure a steady stream of student intake and consistent student retention.** That said, this is an often overlooked element for educators.

Impactful educational emails are about nurturing and building relationships, whether your target audience is a long-time "customer" or new prospect. Direct marketing channels, like emailers, allow you to communicate to segmented groups to achieve three important aims:



Inform and educate your audience



Form a deeper connection with them



Establish your institution as authoritative

For this reason, brand communication in this space is highly competitive, and being able to **stand out from competitors** is critical.

We'll now delve into deeper detail about the role of behaviour when it comes to making education-related decisions.



*Source: www.macrotrends.net/countries/ZAF/south-africa/education-spending

Behavioural Linguistics

We use language in all aspects of our lives, and it's important to know **how powerful language can be** in shaping people's views, feelings, thoughts, and actions.

This is where Behavioural Linguistics comes in: communication that is rooted in behaviour. It questions WHY we make the decisions we do and HOW we end up making these decisions.

The end goal? To seek out patterns of communication that are more effective when it comes to engaging your audience.

Behavioural Linguistics		
= Behavioural Science + Psychology + Linguistics		
	SEMANTICS Words	Vocabulary choice and word frequencies.
	SYNTAX Grammar	Sentence length, tense, and use of grammar.
	PHONETICS Sounds	Literary and poetic devices like alliteration and assonance.
	VISUALS Imagery	Fonts, colours, GIFs, icons, emojis, and imagery used.
	HEURISTICS Biases	Mental shortcuts we use to make our decisions.



“Every single word that you use must have purpose. If not, get rid of it. All too often brands in the thought leadership space, like education and training, elevate their language and make things too complex. We know that behaviourally this has the opposite effect on persuasion. People don’t engage with things they don’t understand.”

– Tegan Crymble, Head of Behavioural Insights, BreadCrumbs Linguistics

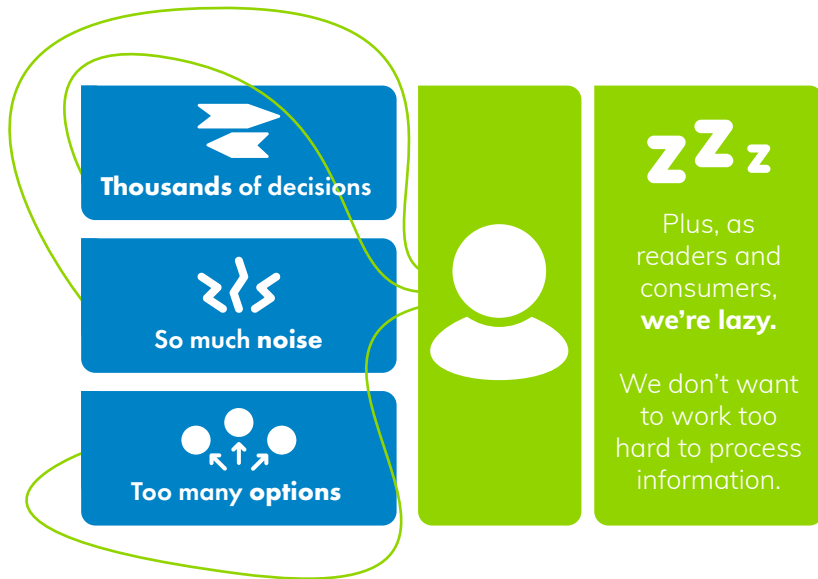


Behavioural Linguistics

The Devil's in the Decision-Making

The application of Behavioural Linguistics in communication is an exciting opportunity for all brands. By understanding why people choose to act in the ways they do, **marketing materials can leverage these insights to ensure more targeted and successful communication.**

Any type of successful business today involves the business of behaviour. How Behavioural Linguistics helps is that it **nudges responsible action through communication** – with the core belief that language is a powerful way to change behaviour.



Build brand affinity and positive sentiment

Convince the customer to adopt a viewpoint

Drive the desired call to action



Behavioural Linguistics

Did you know using the right types of language in communications can boost consumer trust?



More **satisfaction with you** as the brand of choice



Increased likelihood of **recommending you** to others



More likely to **support other parts** of your business



More likely to **stay with you** as their brand of choice

High Trust = Boosted Loyalty & ROI

What Does This Mean for Marketing in the Education Sector?

We can tailor brand communication to consider how our readers make decisions by **focusing on ways to boost the trust they feel for a brand**. This helps to encourage certain behaviours: for example, opening an email from a school or tertiary institution, clicking a link to a website or sales platform, and ultimately “purchasing” a service by enrolling.

These elements are taken into consideration as part of this research report, with notable examples detailed as part of the analysis.

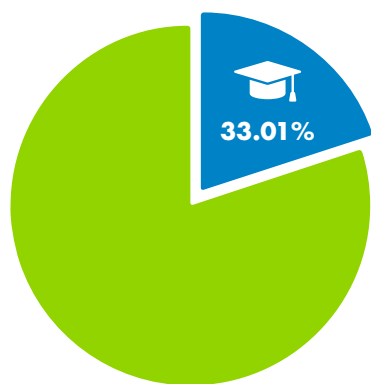


Research Results

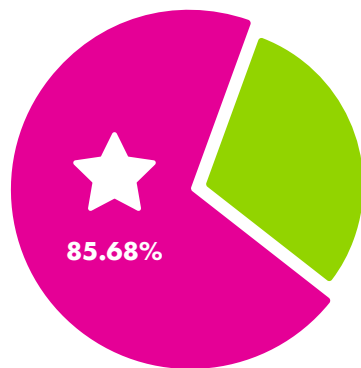
Email Marketing Benchmarks

Everlytic's latest Email Marketing Benchmarks Report shows the average open rate for emails in the education and training industry in 2022 was 33.01% – up from 30.97% in 2020.

The open rate average of the top 20 education mailers greatly outshone this benchmark at 85.68%.



Average open rate
**Education & Training
Industry**



Average open rate
**Top 20 Education
Mailers**

Education showed the highest drop in unsubscribes since 2020 (-59%). Interestingly, unsubscribes in this industry were at an all-time high in 2020 (0.34%), and **now they're at an all-time low in 2022.**

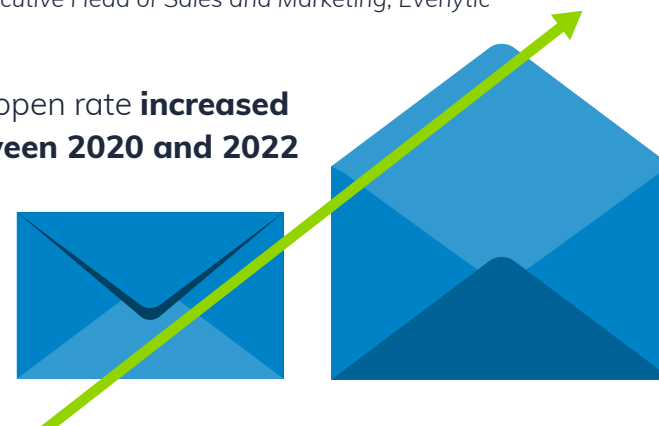
This volatility suggests that either educational institutions have changed how they use email to communicate, or the learners themselves are responding differently due to shifts in the learning space.



“Email is definitely a serious medium. It’s a medium that’s going to continue to expand and grow. Just look at email in your own life, your inbox is the backbone of how you govern your daily life.”

– Louise Krog, Executive Head of Sales and Marketing, Everlytic

The average open rate **increased** by **17% between 2020 and 2022**



Research Results

5 Key Language Themes

01

Language of Innovation

Aligned to the global trend of education innovation, prospective parents and students want to know that their chosen education brand is cutting-edge and keeping up with technology advances. References which cue novelty and a fresh approach are powerful drivers of behaviour.

Examples in Action

- Our new website
- Our innovative world
- New school announcement
- Gearing up for the new academic year
- Next exciting chapter
- Next steps in your career

02

Language of the Future

Aligned to the previous theme, this looks specifically at the role of future-facing language to position the education institution as one that's changing with the challenges of the time and "future-ready" for Fourth Industrial Revolution success.

Examples in Action

- Future-focused
- Future-oriented
- You'll spend a lot of time as a student
- Now is the time to look forward
- Our vision for the coming years

03

Language of Discovery

A common trend across the mailers was the theme of exploration and adventure: starting a new chapter in life whether that was school or tertiary studies. Here, the reader is cued to their potential – what they can hope to achieve in life by being affiliated with the brand communicating to them.

Examples in Action

- Explore all funding opportunities
- Change the world
- Enhance your university experience
- Embark on your academic journey

04

Language of Urgency

When a brand sends an action-oriented mailer, the ultimate outcome is for the reader to click through to complete the action. When this is framed as limited in time or number, people feel a sense of urgency and are more likely to perceive the offer as more valuable and act quicker to secure it.

Examples in Action

- Apply now
- Now exclusively open
- Register now
- RSVP NOW
- Click before 23 September

05

Language of Quality

Education brands want their readers to aspire to attend their institutions and position themselves with adjectives like leading, world-class and prestigious – the language of quality – to convey value.

Examples in Action

- Our innovative, future-oriented world
- World-class
- Top 1% of universities in the world
- Our prestigious campus
- One of South Africa's leading universities

Research Results

The Feast Framework

For this report, we've structured our findings using the Feast Framework which is a behavioural tool you can use with your teams when you're creating your own content.



Make It **FUN**

Add a sense of dazzle and delight to the reader's experience wherever possible.



Make It **EASY**

Remove effort to make the action as simple and effortless as possible for your reader.



Make It **ATTRACTIVE**

Showcase your benefits to maximise the perceived value and make these benefits salient.



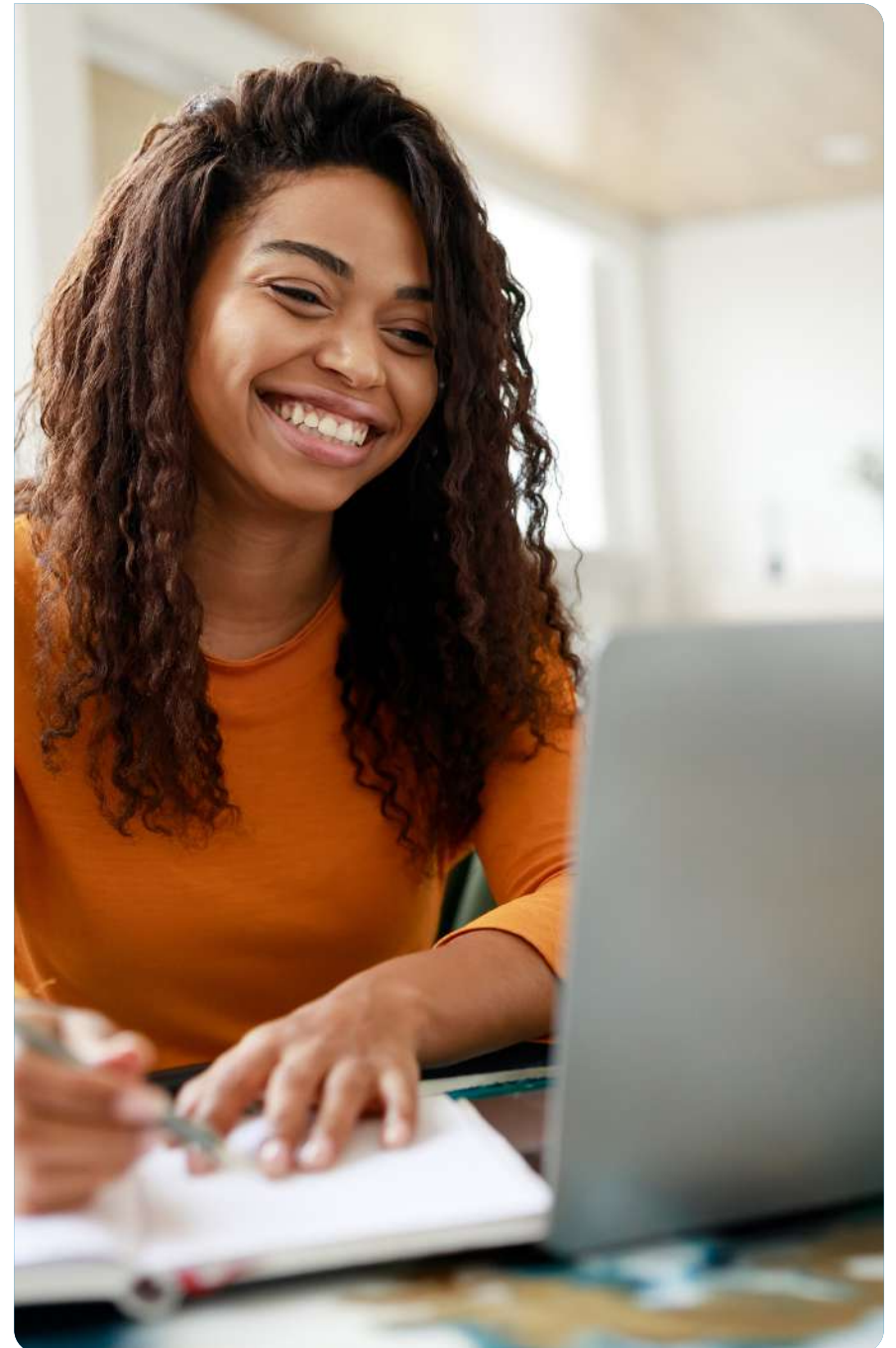
Make It **SOCIAL**

Upweight what's popular by showing that your desired behaviour is supported by others.



Make It **TIMELY**

Communicate knowing that we respond to messages differently based on when we get them.



Research Results

Our Feast Findings



Make It Fun

The concept of fun is an important one for getting a reader to act in a desired way. When things are fun, we are far more likely to do the action and – most importantly for sustainable behavioural change – adopt the new behaviour as a longer-term habit. Educators know first-hand that **well-crafted educational entertainment is a powerful tool for generating positive behaviour change** – and this is just as important for their brand marketing and communications. We saw **FUN** play out in two ways in our language analysis:



1. Celebration Semantics

We have a tendency to get bored easily. We lose enjoyment in things because of what's termed hedonic adaptation – a phenomenon that suggests our level of happiness returns to a set baseline regardless of our life events or purchases. The solution here in direct marketing is **novelty in our communications that highlight the new and fun**.

You're not just selling an education; you're selling a future. An adventure. An experience.

A key trend across the top mailers was the framing of fun through invitations to join the school, university, or training facility for an event. Here, readers feel exclusively invited to attend a function with **celebratory language upweighted to boost our sense of enjoyment**.



2. The Role of Poetic Devices

Alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, repetition, puns, metaphors, and descriptive adjectives are all great linguistic tools for creating engaging writing and, more importantly, persuasive writing. These help to add an element of fun into a communication, which has been shown to **boost immediate interest and improve longer-term recall**.



Examples in Action

- Please join us to celebrate
- You're invited
- Virtual meet-and-great events
- Welcome to the best years of your life!
- Limited seats available – RSVP here



Examples in Action

- Our exclusive event
- Set yourself up for success
- Enhance your experience
- Gear up for the year
- From the library lawns to the laboratories



Research Results

Our Feast Findings



Make It Easy

As readers, we are inherently lazy and always seek out the path of least resistance. Where brand content is slick and seamless, we're more likely to be persuaded to follow through with a call to action. Because of this, **framing processes as simple, easy, quick, and convenient (as long as you're being truthful!)** is crucial in nudging behaviour – and these themes carry through in the top-performing mailers. We saw **EASY** play out in two ways in our language analysis:



1. Navigation Devices

An analysis of the top 20 mailers showed the majority of the **successful mailers included simple, step-by-step breakdowns** of registration, onboarding, or sign-up processes, through navigation “breadcrumbs” like bold text, bullet points, or infographics.

Where more complex information was included, this was done using video tutorials as multi-media click-throughs to the brand's YouTube channel.



2. Support Semantics

Another key trend was the helpful and friendly tone across all top mailers where **language of support and assistance** was evident. The benefits of using this type of positive language are that it puts your reader at ease, addresses any objections they may be having, and boosts a sense of confidence and trust between reader and brand.



Examples in Action

- Access and complete the quick and easy registration process
- We'll handle that
- What you need to know
- Step-by-step instructions
- We are ready to assist you

Research Results

Our Feast Findings



Make It Attractive

Making an action attractive is about two main behavioural elements: We need to **draw our reader's attention to our message** and **make the action we want them to take as appealing as possible**. We saw **ATTRACTIVE** play out in two ways in our language analysis:



1. Imagery

Imagery is a powerful tool for capturing attention and evoking emotion, which helps to drive action. In the education space, **one of the most important emotions to build is trust**.

This can be conveyed through colour psychology (trust colours tend to be blue, white, and grey), representative demographics in imagery and illustrations, and upweighting imagery with eye contact, hands, and smiling which convey confidence and connection.

An analysis of the top 20 mailers revealed that the majority of these successful mailers included **visuals of students in the top banner** of the mailer, followed by **visuals of the school or education facility's buildings or premises**.

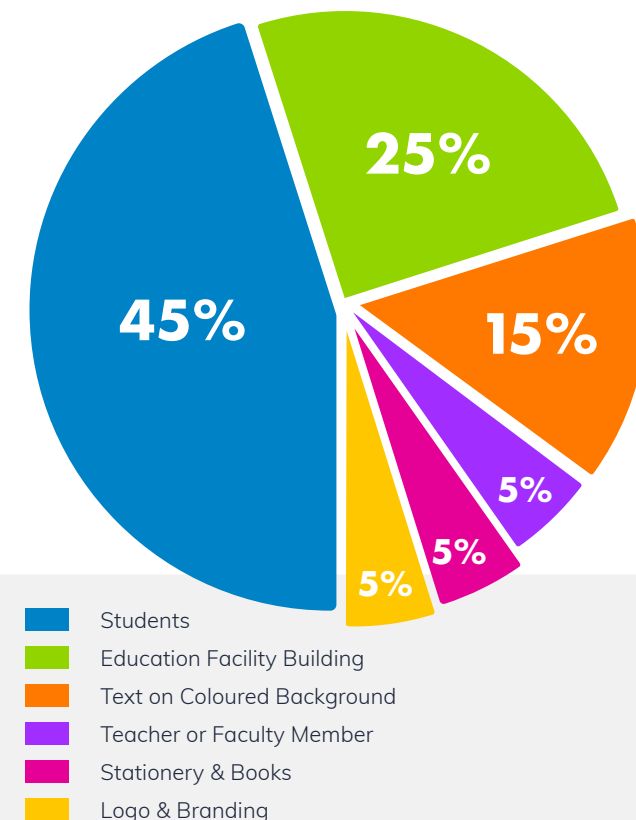


2. Calls to Action

A call to action (CTA) is the part of an email that encourages the reader to do something. In the education space, this often means clicking through to accept an event invite, enrol for a course or register for a new school. With **clear headings and bold CTAs, you can grab your readers' attention** and get them to take action.

CTAs can either be created as text hyperlinks in the copy or standalone buttons. From the analysis, it was clear that **standalone buttons that were framed with language of urgency were more successful at driving email engagement**.

Percentage of mailers that used the below imagery



Examples in Action

- RSVP here by Sunday
- RSVP now
- Complete our survey
- Limited seats: RSVP

Research Results

Our Feast Findings



Make It Social

We are heavily influenced by what those around us do and say. This is called our social proof bias and we can use this in our communication to reflect the desired behaviour(s) across a membership base. **When we think others are doing something or endorse it, we want to do it too.** We saw **SOCIAL** play out in two ways in our language analysis:



1. Connection-Building Pronouns

4 of the 5 most common words used across the best-performing mailers were all pronouns.

1. **You** 2. **Your** 3. Will 4. **Our** 5. **We**

The use of personal pronouns **you/your** helps to make content relatable and allows the reader to picture themselves or their families directly in the setting. We also see considerable reference to **we/our** pronouns across the mailers and **these inclusive pronouns directly boost our level of social connection with a brand** making us feel part of their story and more likely to want to align our social identity with theirs.



2. Social Identity

In many ways, our schooling and education background contributes to our social identity; that is, how we see ourselves, the values we believe we reflect, and the traits that we admire in others. A common trend across the most popular mailers was that the **institutions emphasised a shared social identity and connection between themselves as the brand and their parents/students.** This was reflected visually (students in matching branded merchandise) as well as linguistically. This also acts as an intrinsic incentive to make the reader feel part of a community: recognised and celebrated for being “part of the pack”.

Examples in Action

- Our campuses are ready
- You and your family
- Wishing you the best of luck
- We are so proud of our high school scholars
- Reach out to us if you need any assistance

Examples in Action

- The Exclusive Top Applicants Event
- Your fellow students
- Come on board! We're waiting for you.
- Be part of our university
- Give you a sneak peek of your campus

Research Results

Our Feast Findings

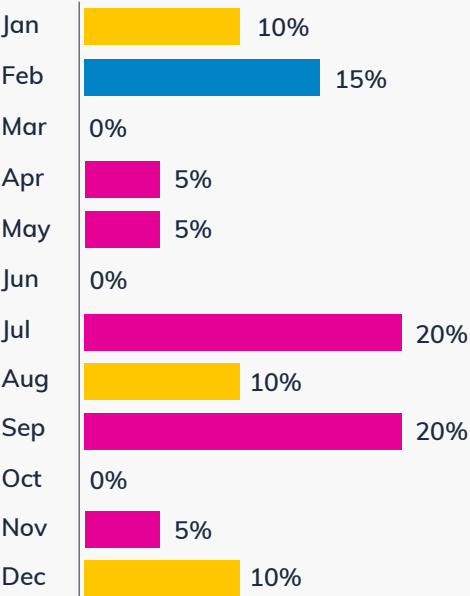


Make It Timely

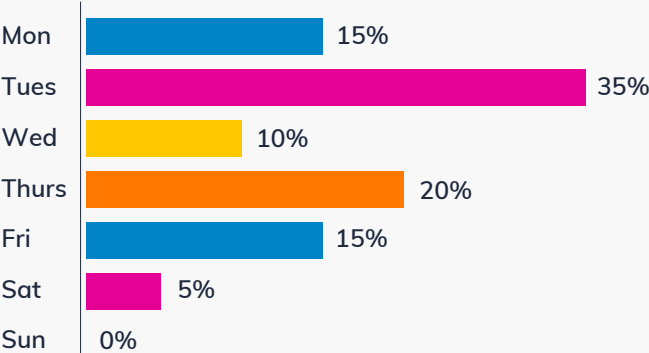
It's not only important to consider what we say, but when we say it. Readers – both parents and students – can be more receptive to a communication based on when they receive it. We saw **TIMELY** play out in three ways in our language analysis:



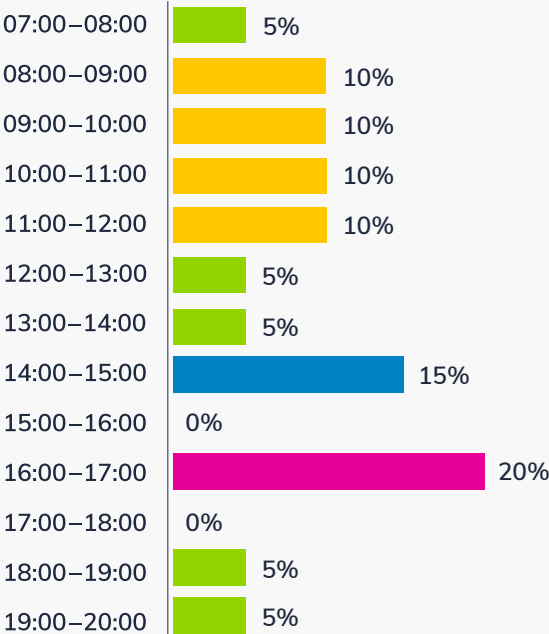
Month Engagement



Day Engagement



Time Engagement



From this dataset, **mid-afternoon sends on a Tuesday and Thursday** were engaged with the most. Based on month sends, **July and September** come out on top, followed by February. This engagement potentially correlates with seasonal communication about school/university holidays (July) and upcoming exam dates (September).

The Final Bell

As South Africa's largest digital messaging platform, Everlytic knows the power of email marketing to build trust and encourage engagement. Our report found this to be true in the education industry.

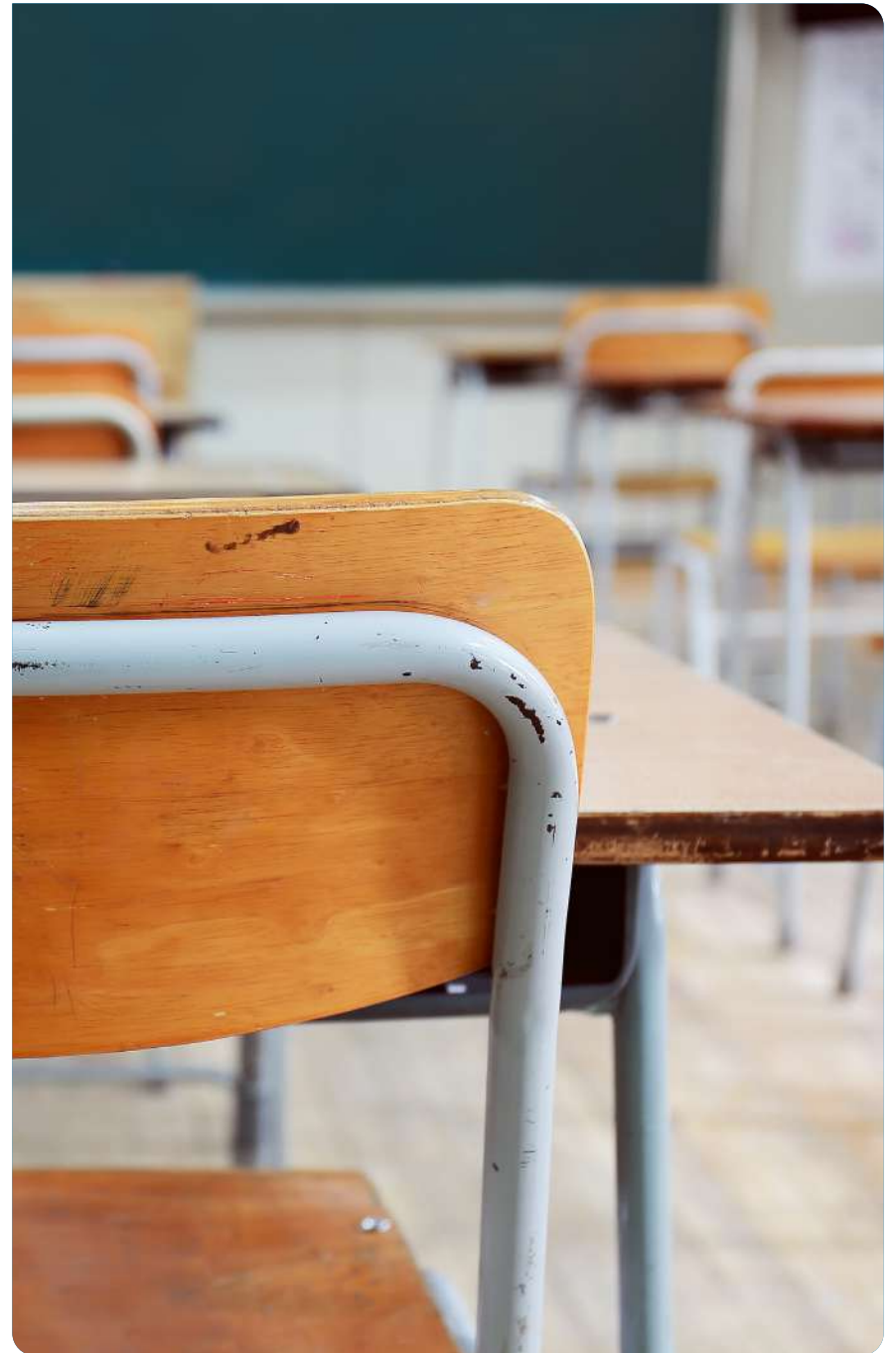
From our research, we saw **education communication that incorporates behavioural language** was most powerful.

In this report, we presented how effective education emails provide information, establish authority, and **persuade our audience to do something**: buy into a brand story, support a service, and end up choosing or promoting an institution, facility, or course.

The great news? Behavioural communication through linguistic nudges is one of the most cost-effective, easy ways to improve brand objectives while still maintaining your **reader's freedom of choice**.

This is an invaluable skillset, and knowing more about the Feast Framework to guide your future content creation can help your brand to reach new heights.

Visit us at www.everlytic.com or [click here](#) to schedule a chat.





Smart Communication Software

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