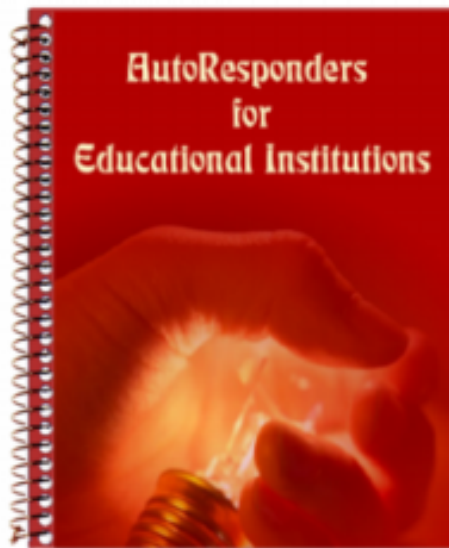


AutoResponders for Educational Institutions

by
Pooja Srinivas



This is an eBook version of a free AutoResponder Series. If you would like to have the updated version of the eCourse, please send an email to edu@coursesuseek.com. You can also pass this eBook on to your friends as long as the contents remain unchanged.

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What are AutoResponders?

AutoResponders are email programs that automatically send a reply whenever someone sends an email to a particular email address. The reply is sent instantly, within a few seconds only. For example, lets say you want to send more information to someone about a course you are offering or a product you want to sell, all you have to do is feed in the required information in your AutoResponder. Whenever anyone sends an email to your AutoResponder, they will immediately get the information, whether you are online or not. This puts your whole system on auto-pilot which runs even when you are not there to monitor it.

There are many ways in which you could use an AutoResponder. Here are some examples :

Educational Institutions

For Educational Institutions, the need is to provide information about their courses to prospective students. Here you could use your AutoResponder to send information about your courses like Eligibility, Fees, Answers to Frequently Asked Questions etc. AutoResponders also have a follow-up facility where you can send a series of emails timed at an interval of specified number of days. This means, you can offer mini-courses like a one week or ten-day course where the students are sent emails timed after 2-3 days during which they can work on an assignment or complete a reading task.

Business Organizations

For Business Organizations, the need is to provide timely information about existing and new products to prospective customers. You could use your AutoResponder to provide detailed descriptions of your products, company reports for shareholders and so on. You can also use it to follow-up on customers who have asked for information about your product, but not yet purchased your product.

Affiliate Programs

In Affiliate programs, the same product may be marketed by hundreds if not thousands of affiliates. If you have joined an affiliate program, then the need would be to reach prospective customers before the other affiliates reach them. You may also need to contact them more than once to close the sale. All this can be accomplished without any trouble if you use AutoResponders.

Why do Educational Institutions need AutoResponders?

As an Educational Institution, you need to send timely information to your prospective students. You may have different ways of contacting your prospective students, through printed brochures or information on the website. But still you may be receiving emails that ask for a particular information that's already in your brochure. Every Educational Institution would have a list of FAQs - frequently asked questions that every prospective student asks. Wouldn't it be easier if you could just create a automatic programme which would send the answers to the FAQs whenever any student asks for it? This is exactly what the AutoResponder does!

At a Glance.....

- ✓ Send Information about Courses
- ✓ Follow-up on Prospective Students
- ✓ Share your Knowledge
- ✓ Create Mini Courses or Remedial Courses
- ✓ Send Online Newsletters

The main advantage of an AutoResponder is that you get the reply immediately, within seconds. In the Internet Age, time is a very important factor and no one is ready to wait for their emails to be answered. However, the reality is that many organizations do not even check their mails regularly. An unanswered email tells the students that you do not care about their queries. An AutoResponder is invaluable in such cases.

Here are some ways you, as an Educational Institution can use the AutoResponder :

Send Information about Courses

You can use the AutoResponder to send information about courses that you offer. If you have more than one course, you may just list your courses with your contact information or create a different AutoResponder for each course. As an example, here are a two AutoResponders. You can try them out by sending an email to :

hmpietr@auto-responders.net
maelt@auto-responders.net

Both are AutoResponders of the same Institute - The first AutoResponder delivers just a list of the courses they offer, along with their contact address, website address and email address. The second AutoResponder, gives a detailed description of one of the courses they offer - Masters in English Language Teaching.

Follow up on Prospective Students

If you have a separate AutoResponder for each course you offer, you will be able to know which students are interested in which courses. You can then send them additional information about the courses or give them information on other related courses that may interest them.

Share your Knowledge

AutoResponders can be a great way to share articles and papers if you do not have a website. Just set them up in an AutoResponder and offer the eMail address to anyone who wants a copy of the article. You can also inform them of your publications and ordering information. Saves a lot of paper and postage too ☺

Create Mini Courses or Remedial Courses

Use your AutoResponder to create short courses that your students can take. It can also be used to create remedial courses where the slow learners can be asked to take the course before they join in with the rest of the class. Mini-courses can also be used to provide a summary or reminder of what was taught in class.

Send Online Newsletters

Many organizations would already have their own print newsletter. You can convert it into an Online newsletter using AutoResponders. Instead of manually sending it through email to each subscriber, you can program your AutoResponder to send it say once in a month or so.

Types of Messages

Single Messages or Multi-part Messages

Single message AutoResponders are useful when you just want to send information about a single product. This could include details of a product, FAQs, list of products you offer or your article. All the information, therefore, will be in the first eMail itself and no more messages will be sent.

Multi-part Messages will have a series of timed messages. Here, the first message will be sent immediately and the other messages can be timed to be sent after a specified number of days. Take for example, this eCourse. The first eMail message from us came immediately after you sent the eMail. The next message came after a day and the next message two days after the last message and so on. Mini courses can be created using this type of AutoResponder Messages.

HTML or Text

Some AutoResponders let you send both text and HTML messages whereas some offer only text message facility. A text AutoResponder will help you add only text messages and you cannot add any graphics, web links, email links etc. While the downside is that the message looks very plain, the advantage is that it can be viewed properly by any eMail program.

HTML AutoResponders allow you to add graphics, web links etc. In short, you can just create a web page and then put it up on your AutoResponder. The advantage is that you can have great looking messages with interactive facility, but the downside is that not many eMail programs may not support HTML eMails. In such a case, the subscriber may not be able to view the message at all.

The only solution to this is to create the message in both HTML and Text format and give the subscriber the choice of selecting the type of message. To create a text message, you can use any text editor like NotePad and for HTML messages you can use a HTML editor like FrontPage. There are also many Free HTML editors available like WebPlus etc.

Choosing an AutoResponder

An important step in creating an AutoResponder series is choosing a good AutoResponder. A good AutoResponder can help enhance your message whereas a bad AutoResponder will ensure that the receiver does not read your message or worse, delete it. So you have to take care that your AutoResponder does not take off the emphasis from your message. With so many AutoResponders available on the Internet, it's hard to choose, but here are a few features that you should have in your AutoResponder.

At a Glance.....

- ✓ Easy Sign-up
- ✓ Follow-up Messages
- ✓ Subscribers' List
- ✓ Advertisement Policy
- ✓ Easy to Remember

Easy Sign-up

To activate your AutoResponder, you have to sign-up for it first. This would need you to enter details like your name, email address etc. If you have to fill in more than one page of information to sign-up, it would be better to look out for another AutoResponder.

Follow-up Messages

Follow-up messages are very essential for any AutoResponder series. Some AutoResponders only allow 3-4 follow-up messages while some may allow up to 13 follow-up messages. Choose the AutoResponder that has the maximum number of follow-ups so that you can expand your message series whenever you want to.

Maintenance of Subscriber's List

A subscriber is anyone who sends an email to your AutoResponder. This is a very important feature as it tells you who is interested in what you are offering. Your AutoResponder should allow you not only to view the subscriber list but also create a backup of it on your hard-disk.

Advertisement Policy

Free AutoResponders invariably come with 3-4 line Advertisements placed right above your message. These Ads are randomly generated and thus, you have no control over them at all. Since these Ads keep on changing each time the message is sent, you have no idea whether the receiver is getting a message with an Ad for an Internet business or a gambling site. An objectionable Ad in your message may mean that the subscriber deletes your message even before reading it.

Easy to Remember

Your AutoResponder address should be easy to remember. For example, if you sign up for an AutoResponder at Auto-Responders.Net, your address would be yourname@auto_responders.net. If you sign-up at FreeAutobot, your address will be yourname@freeautobot.com. Sign up for an AutoResponder address which will be easy for your subscribers to remember.

Types of AutoResponders

There are two types of AutoResponders available - free AutoResponders and paid AutoResponders. Again in paid AutoResponders, you have CGI Script AutoResponders which you can install in your own site. Here are some more details on different types of AutoResponders :

Free AutoResponders

Free AutoResponders attach a 3-4 line advertisement before and sometimes after your message. The advantage of such an AutoResponder is that you do not have to invest any money but the disadvantage is that you have no control over the ads attached in your message. The sponsor message may range from anything like software, to gambling sites etc. The Ads are a great disadvantage because if the subscriber sees an inappropriate Ad in your message, he will associate it with you message and may even delete it.

However, there are some good free AutoResponder Services which provide Ad free messages. The best in this category is Auto-Responders.Net which does not place any Ad message except a small line for it's own Service. To sign up at their site, just go to www.auto-responders.net

Paid AutoResponders

Paid AutoResponders require you to pay a monthly fee for removing the Ads. While the advantage is that you no longer have to worry about which Ads pop up in your message, the disadvantage is that you end up paying a big amount whether or not you use your AutoResponder. Another disadvantage is that you cannot change the AutoResponder's address even after payment. For example, if you sign up at Auto-Responders.Net, the address will remain yourname@auto-responders.net whether you sign up for a free one or you pay for it every month.

CGI Scripts

CGI Script AutoResponders are another category of paid AutoResponders which can be installed on your own website. The main advantage is that you can use your website name in your AutoResponder. For example, your AutoResponder address will be something like yourname@yourwebsite.com. This enhances your brand image and the subscribers can easily associate it with your organization. Another advantage is that you only have to pay a one time amount after which you can use it on your site without need of further payments. You can also customize your AutoResponder according to your needs. The only disadvantage with CGI Scripts may be that you would need to do all the installation in your site, which may seem difficult at present. However, these days there are user-friendly scripts which do not have this problem.

The best in this category is [AutoResponse Plus](http://www.coursesuseek.com/arplus.htm) which has innumerable features. You can have unlimited AutoResponders with unlimited follow-up messages once you install it. Installation is also not much of a hassle since it has an installation file which helps you install the software properly. For more details, go to <http://www.coursesuseek.com/arplus.htm>.

Ten Tips to create an AutoResponder Message

Remind the Reader

Many subscribers may just sign-up for an AutoResponder and forget about it. When your mail arrives in the Inbox, they may just not know why they signed up. So, the first step – remind the reader why they are receiving the message and what they will get out of it.

Concentrate on Content

Content is THE main part of your AutoResponder. Subscribers give you their email because they are interested in the information you are offering. So give them exactly what they signed-up for. Try to make your message as info-packed as it can be. Don't offer them the same thing that's available in hundreds of sites on the Internet.

Stick to the Point

It's easy to write pages and pages on a subject you know. But control your urge to do so ☺. People prefer to read small pieces of information while online and would appreciate it if you get to the point and stick to it without wasting their time.

Keep it Short & Simple

Avoid technical jargon. If the subscriber does not understand what you are trying to say, your message may be of no use to them. Use simple language and if technical words are necessary, try to include an explanation.

Offer Information in Chunks

Don't offer too much in a single AutoResponder Message. If you have lots of information, it's better to convert it into separate modules and send them as follow-up messages. However, for things like information on your Institute, courses offered etc, send the info in one single message. If it goes beyond one page, reduce the material and offer a contact information for further details.

Personalize your message

Many AutoResponders offer the facility of personalizing your message using the name given. In the message you just have to add Dear {FIRSTNAME} and the receiver's name will be added their automatically. This gives a personal touch to your message and the receiver too does not feel that he has received the email from an automated software.

To get the first name of your subscriber, you can use a web form option to sign up. That means, instead of sending a blank email directly to you, they will send it through a form which asks them for both name & email address.

Follow-up

Follow-up is an important aspect of any AutoResponder series. Many-a-times, a one time message may not be enough. If the message does not have any room for follow-up messages, design weekly or monthly updates to be sent to the subscriber.

Plan the Series

If you are adding follow-up messages, plan the series in such a way that there is a connectivity through-out the series. In the beginning of the message, add a line as to what you did in the previous message and while closing, add a line as to what the reader can expect to see in the next message.

Don't Spam

Don't send your Message to anyone who has not signed-up for your information. Also, add an unsubscribe link (this is done automatically by the AutoResponders) which will give a choice to the subscriber to remove himself from the list if he wants to. An eMail which has no unsubscribe link will be seen as spam i.e. junk mail.

Continue the Contact

It could happen that even though you think that your Message contains all the information there is to give, there might be some subscribers who may have some questions. Give them a way to contact you. Put in your contact information - Name, your eMail address, postal address (if necessary) and tell them that you would welcome any queries. This does not mean that all subscribers will start pestering you with eMails, but it will reassure them to know that they can contact you if need be.

At a Glance.....

- ✓ **Remind the Reader**
- ✓ **Concentrate on Content**
- ✓ **Stick to the Point**
- ✓ **Keep it Short & Simple**
- ✓ **Offer Information in Chunks**
- ✓ **Personalize your Message**
- ✓ **Follow-up**
- ✓ **Plan the Series**
- ✓ **Don't Spam**
- ✓ **Continue the Contact**

Feature Checklist - AutoResponse Plus

(Best AutoResponder in the Paid Category)

- ✓ URL : <http://www.coursesuseek.com/arplus.htm>
- ✓ Free/Paid : Paid Software
- ✓ AutoResponder Type : CGI Script
- ✓ Installation Time : 1 Hour
- ✓ AutoResponder Address : yourname@yourdomain.com
- ✓ Features include *
 - AutoResponder address with your own domain name
 - Easy Installation
 - Unlimited AutoResponders
 - Unlimited Follow-ups
 - Supports both HTML and Text
 - Personalization – both Basic and Advanced
 - Maintain as many Subscriber Lists
 - Add subscribers manually, with web forms and through eMail
 - Export and Import Subscriber List
 - Control Messages from your own Website
 - Customize each AutoResponder according to your needs
 - Low one-time cost
 - Fantastic Support Team

- * These are just a few of the features available in AutoResponse Plus. The comprehensive list of features (which, by the way, runs into several pages) is available on their site. There is also a trial of the software available online. For more details, just click on to <http://www.coursesuseek.com/arplus.htm>.

- ✓ You can go in for this AutoResponder if
 - You have your own website (for eg. www.yourname.com - not a free website)
 - You want an AutoResponder address with your own website address
 - You would like to setup more than 2-3 AutoResponders with different number of follow-up messages

Feature Checklist – AutoResponders Net

(Best AutoResponder in the Free Category)

- ✓ URL : <http://www.auto-responders.net>
- ✓ Free/Paid : Free AutoResponder
- ✓ Sign-up Time : 5 Minutes for each AutoResponder
- ✓ AutoResponder Address : yourname@auto-responders.net
- ✓ Features include
 - One AutoResponder per sign-up
 - 13 Follow-up Messages
 - Minimum Ads - one line Ad of AutoResponders Net only
 - Supports both HTML and Text
 - Personalization - Basic
 - Easy to use Control Panel
 - Easily maintainable Subscriber List
 - Add subscribers manually, with web forms and through eMail
 - Export and Import Subscriber List
- ✓ You can go in for this AutoResponder if
 - You do not have your own website
 - You want to setup only one or two AutoResponders

Frequently Asked Questions on AutoResponders

I do not have a website. How can an AutoResponder help me?

If you do not have a website, an AutoResponder is all the more necessary. This will provide you one way of getting in touch with prospective students all over the world. You can place your AutoResponder address on all your stationary – letterheads, envelopes, visiting cards etc and your prospective students will be able to get the information they want, without you having to be online. You can register for a free AutoResponder to start with and if you feel the need, create a website later on.

I already have a website. Why do I need an AutoResponder?

You may already have a website, but do you know who visits your website and which sections they visit? With an AutoResponder, you not only have the eMail address of the prospective students but you also know in which areas they are interested in. This helps you send targeted and customized messages. A major advantage if you have a website is that you can install your own AutoResponder at your site. This means that the AutoResponder address will be something like yourname@yourwebsite.com, which will help in enhancing the association with your site.

What if I get an enquiry by Post?

A majority of students now have an eMail address and may enquire by eMail itself. But there are some who may send an enquiry through post. In such a case, if they have given a eMail id, you can add it to the subscriber list and send them the message instantly. Even if they do not have a eMail id, you can still send a print-out of the AutoResponder message. You are still saving time, since you already have the ready-made message and do not have to spend time in typing out the reply. Do remember to include your website address and AutoResponder address in the mail to inform them that they can also get the information online.

I do not know HTML. How can I create HTML messages?

You do not need to know HTML to create HTML messages. Nowadays, there are many user-friendly HTML editors available where all you have to do is type in the information and it will be converted to HTML. For this you can use free HTML editors like FrontPage Express, WebPlus etc. which can be downloaded from the Internet.

A Note from the Author

Hi,

I hope you enjoyed the information in this eBook. You can get updated versions of this eCourse and more advanced courses in a variety of subjects at www.coursesuseek.com

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Thanks ☺

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