# campusM Notification Analysis

## How to get the most out of campusM notifications

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# Introduction

When thinking about your institutional communication strategy with students, app notifications often come up as a quick and easy solution. But, with great power comes great responsibility – if your students feel like they're being spammed with irrelevant information, they can revoke your app's permissions to send push notifications on their device, and you lose a valuable communication channel.

What can institutions do to communicate effectively with their students when using group notifications? To answer this question, we looked at all notifications sent by institutions to groups of people from the last year and tried to understand which ones had succeeded in creating engaging push notifications, and which ones failed to pique their students' interest.

From our analysis, we were able to extract **5 data-driven guidelines for successful campusM notifications**. The math of how we came to these guidelines can be in the second half of this document, if you're interested.

# Group Notification Guidelines

## Guideline 1: Target Your Message!

When looking at the data, we found a noticeable difference between institutions' strategies and their resulting engagement:

- **Institutions with high-performing notifications** were far more likely to send notifications to **groups of all sizes**. These groups could be as small as dozens of students, or as big as tens of thousands.
- **Institutions with low-performing notifications** were far more likely to send notifications exclusively to larger groups of several thousand to tens of thousands of students, and they **tended not to vary the size of their target groups**.

By making use of campusM's built-in segmentation and personalization framework, institutions can easily ensure that their target group matches their message. campusM can make use of information your institution already has, such as year of study, major, disability status, accommodation status, and more to help you target messages precisely to the people who need to hear them. This, in turn, results in higher engagement rates for communications, and a more informed student population who is trained to know that when they get a buzz in their pocket from their institution, it's probably important to them to read it.

As you will always have notifications that need a larger audience, generally, **you should always target the smallest possible group (within reason) for each notification sent**.

| 💡 Example | ❌ Don't | ✅ Do |
|---|---|---|
| One of the campus parking lots will be closed this week for repairs. | Send a notification to all students on campus. | Send a notification to all students with a relevant parking permit. |

## Guideline 2: Title Composition

While the numbers are very informative – we also wanted to look at the semantics. When analyzing the titles of the top-performing 100 notifications of this dataset we found that a vast majority followed these rules:

- **Short and Sweet** – the median notification title was 39 characters long.
- **Call to Action (CTA)** – these notifications featured a clear CTA, which was often also indicated as time-sensitive by use of words like "urgent", "today", or "final".
- **Informative Emojis** – emoji use was high, and it was always indicative of either its urgency (e.g., ⚠️), or the contents of the notification (e.g., a 🎭 emoji indicated a theatre-related notification).

These rules are crucial to follow, because they can make the difference between a successful notification, and one that no one opens. Your students' attention is a scarce resource that's constantly at increased demand, and the decision on whether to open or dismiss a push notification happens quickly and often without deliberate thought. Minimizing the amount of cognitive effort required for this decision will increase student's tendency to open the notification, rather than dismissing it.

| 💡 Example | ❌ Don't | ✅ Do |
|---|---|---|
| Composing a title for your notification about stargazing night for students hosted by the physics department. | "All students are invited tonight at 8PM to stargaze with our Astronomy expert, Prof. Smith"<br>(90 char) | " 🥜 Come stargazing tonight at 8PM!"<br>(35 char) |

## Guideline 3: Quality Gatekeeping

Institutions often ask: how can they know if they're sending too many notifications, or too little? Is there a "Goldilocks" number of notifications that's *just* right?

From looking at our data, we've found this is probably not as important as some institutions think. The connection between number of notifications sent and overall engagement wasn't very significant, and the benefits of sending more notifications were small.

Instead, to avoid spamming students in quick succession when multiple stakeholders demand multiple notifications, we suggest having **a single human strategic gatekeeper for notifications**, done in campusM with App Manager user permissions. Their main job is to ask the three following questions of any notification request that comes through:

1. **Can this be targeted better?** This both echoes the first guideline (Target Your Message!) and decreases the chance of overwhelming any one student with too many notifications.
2. **Can this be worded better?** See Guideline 2 (Title Composition) for more information on how to optimize notification titles.
3. **When should this be scheduled?** While stakeholders may assume that notifications can go out immediately, it's better to plan your communications to avoid all the departments sending out their messaging on the same day of the week.

| 💡 Example | ❌ Don't | ✅ Do |
|---|---|---|
| The Dean of Students, the Finance department and the Student Union have all asked for a notification to be sent. | Send all three notifications immediately without question. | Ask for more information to suggest a more precise targeting and inform them of how their notification will fit into the planned weekly schedule. |

## Guideline 4: Performance Benchmarks

While we can't tell you how to define your own success, we can provide some data-based suggestions on when a notification is doing well or poorly in comparison.

We found that there is a clear and mathematically predictable relationship between the number of recipients and the number of readers a notification has. **We've done the math and worked out some useful benchmarks of notification performance based on number of recipients and engagement quartiles** – though it's important to remember that no institution is the average institution, and your results may vary. Use the campusM Notification Benchmark Calculator to determine your notifications' success in comparison to similarly sized notifications from other institutions.

| **Benchmark** | **Lower Quartile** | | **Expected** | | **Upper Quartile** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Explanation** | Below this number, a notification may be underperforming. | | This is about the expected performance for a notification. | | Above this number, a notification is doing fantastic! | |
| **Engagement % Equation** | $23.8 \times (Recipients)^{-0.211}$ | | $28.3 \times (Recipients)^{-0.158}$ | | $41 \times (Recipients)^{-0.12}$ | |
| **Readers Equation** | $0.238 \times (Recipients)^{0.789}$ | | $0.283 \times (Recipients)^{0.842}$ | | $0.41 \times (Recipients)^{0.88}$ | |
| **Examples:** | **Engagement** | **Readers** | **Engagement** | **Readers** | **Engagement** | **Readers** |
| **100 Recipients** | 9.01% | 9 | 13.67% | 14 | 23.59% | 24 |
| **1,000 Recipients** | 5.54% | 55 | 9.5% | 95 | 17.9% | 179 |
| **10,000 Recipients** | 3.41% | 341 | 6.6% | 660 | 13.58% | 1,358 |
| **100,000 Recipients** | 2.1% | 2,097 | 4.59% | 4,590 | 10.3% | 10,298 |

Note that the number of readers goes up with the number of recipients, but not as fast. This means that more recipients will get you more readers overall, but the engagement rate will go down.

If you're not used to mobile marketing, these numbers might sound low – but in fact they are higher than industry standards. Marketing through push notifications usually gets about a 4% open rate or even lower, and apps in the Education sector like campusM can go even as low as 1.77%. However, as you can see from the table above, campusM notifications easily out-perform these metrics, even when they do relatively poorly.

| 💡 Example | ❌ Don't | ✅ Do |
|---|---|---|
| Planning a new notification strategy for the university. | Set a flat 15% engagement rate goal for all notifications. | Define a notification's success by your business goals and the number of recipients it has. |

## Guideline 5: Focus on What Matters

Now that we've covered all the things that do matter, here are all the things we found **don't** have a measurable effect on notification engagement:

- Day of the week a notification was sent
- Time of year a notification was sent
- Number of notifications sent overall
- How often you send notifications – so long as you're consistent

So long as you keep your notifications relevant, and time them in relation to their respective contexts – and you follow the guidelines mentioned above – your notifications should do perfectly fine.

# Summary

While there are many factors that determine the success of your notification campaigns and communication strategies, we are happy to say that there is some method to be found in the madness. campusM's notification abilities are strong, thanks to its targeting capabilities, which are crucial to notification success.




The best part is that this data only covers group notifications, and there's still a lot more to be learned about individual notifications (perhaps to be covered in another future post). Our hope is that you can use these guidelines to better inform the strategy that's right for your institution, so that you and your students can get the most out of campusM.

# The Math Behind the Guidelines

If you're interested in how we came to the 5 guidelines above, what math was involved and want to see some neat graphs, you're in the right place!

## About the Data

This dataset includes all notifications sent via campusM to more than 10 people from April 11th 2025 to April 14th 2026. Institutions that sent 2 notifications or fewer during this period (14 in total) were excluded from the analysis, as we only want to include institutions that send notifications with *some* regularity. After these exclusions, we were left with:

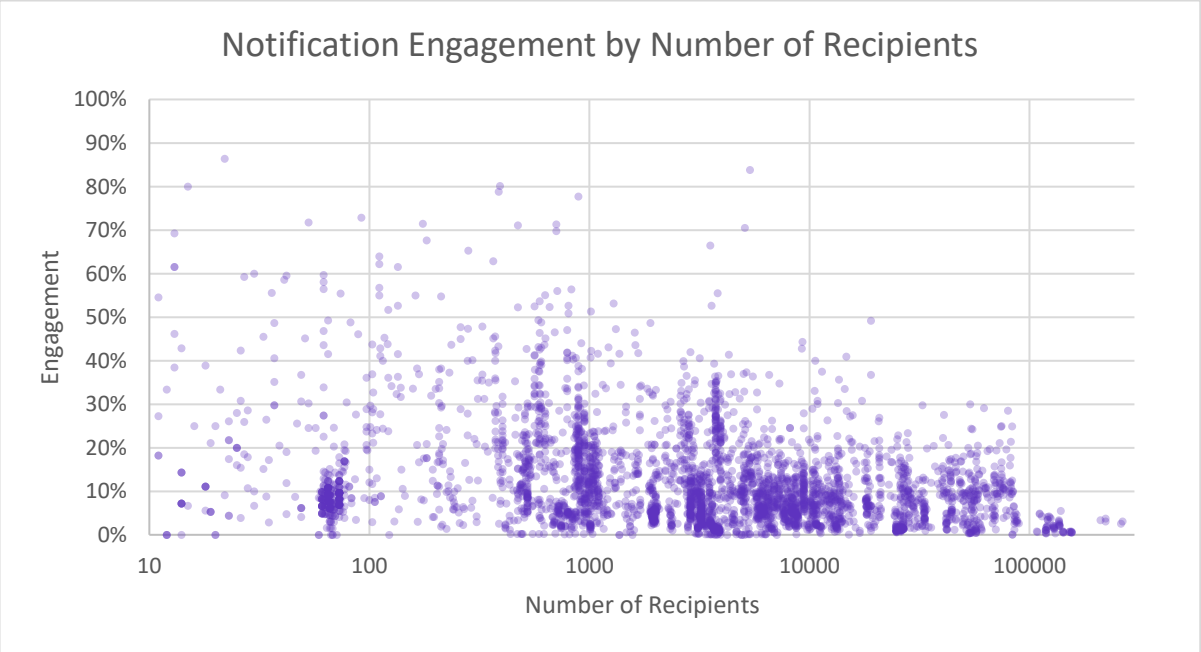
- Number of institutions analyzed: 56
- Number of notifications analyzed: 3,851

### Key Terms and Definitions

- Recipients: The number of unique users that a notification was sent to.
    - Note: In some cases, this may include users who are still in the system, but who no longer have the app installed, or are no longer active.
- Readers: The number of users that have *opened* a notification. This can be done by getting to the "Alerts" page by tapping the actual push notification or navigation in the app, and then opening the specific alert.
- Engagement: The number of readers, divided by the number of recipients, displayed as a percentage. This can be thought of as the conversion- or open- rate.

## At First Glance

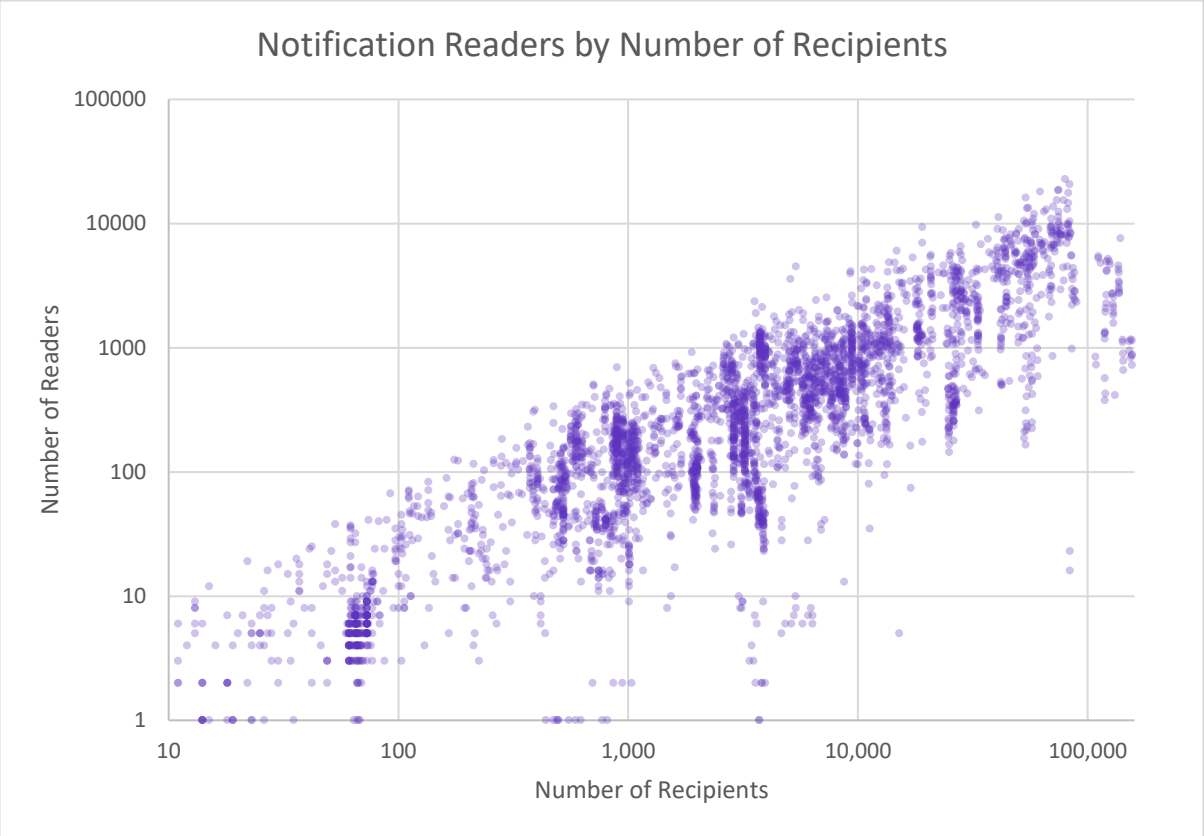
When plotting the engagement of each notification by the number of recipients, we can already see a clear and highly-significant pattern: **the more recipients a notification has, the less engagement it will get** ($Spearman's\ \rho = -0.291,\ p < 10^{-78}$).




Each dot represents one notification, and darker areas indicate a high density of notifications. The horizontal axis is logarithmic for visibility (with a normal axis, the data points are too close together to see any pattern).

The logic behind this is straightforward – a notification sent to 10 thousand people has a much lower chance of being relevant to any single person in that group than a notification sent to a smaller group of 200. This means that, generally, **you should always target the smallest possible group (within reason) for each notification sent**.

That being said, a high number of recipients isn't always a bad thing. If you care less about the Engagement rate, and you care more about the absolute number of Readers for your notifications – bigger is better! Generally, **more recipients will get you more readers – despite a lower engagement rate.**

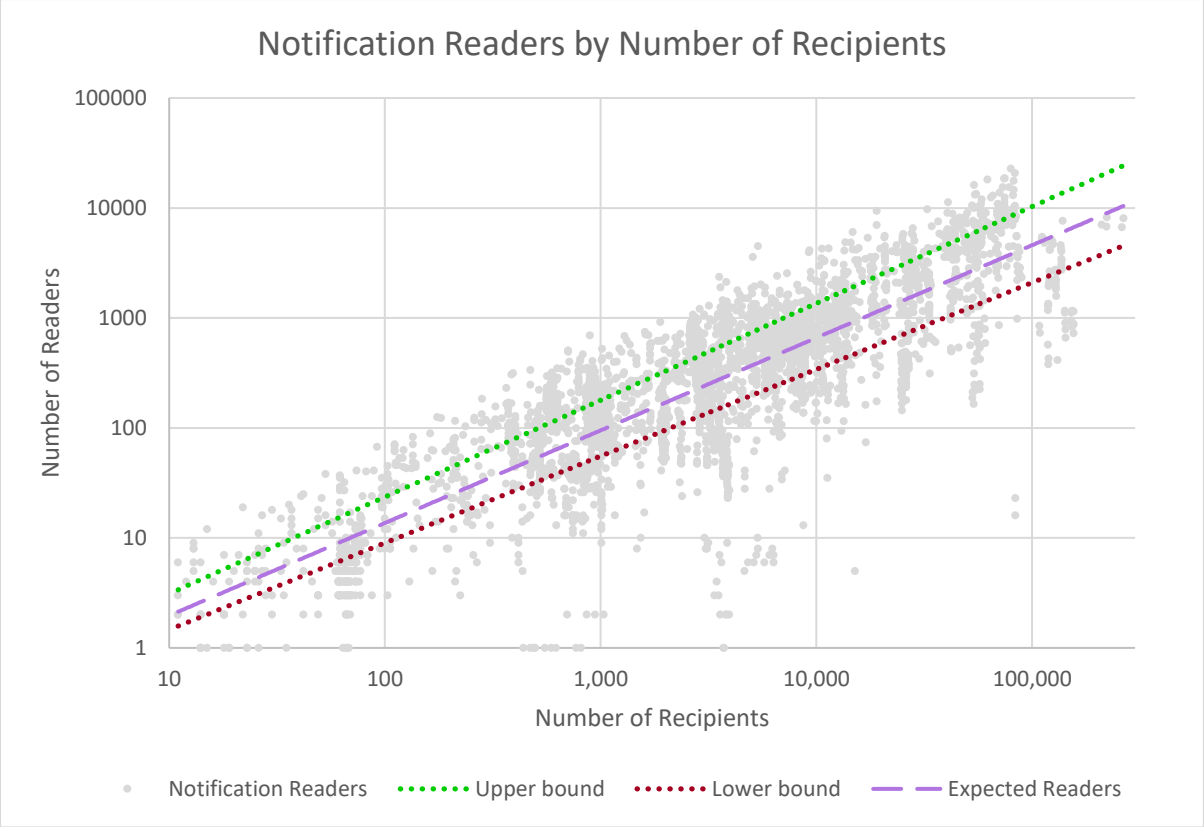



Each dot represents one notification, and darker areas indicate a high density of notifications. Horizontal and vertical axes are logarithmic. 20 notifications with 0 readers were removed from the analysis as they cannot be displayed on a logarithmic axis.

## Measuring Performance

The graph above showing the number of Readers and Recipients caught our eye - that data looked awfully like a (somewhat noisy) straight line. This indicated a predictable mathematic relationship between the number of recipients and the number of readers.

This is important, as institutions often struggle to determine the success of their notification campaigns. What engagement percentage is considered 'good' is a question that we get quite often from institutions, that we can now answer. By trial and error, we were able to come up with quartile-based equations to serve as benchmarks for notification performance based on number of recipients.




Each dot represents one notification, see table below for trendline definitions. Horizontal and vertical axes are logarithmic. 20 notifications with 0 readers were removed from the analysis as they cannot be displayed on a logarithmic axis.

| **Line** | **Equation** (x – number of recipients, y - number of readers) | **Explanation** |
|---|---|---|
| Green, Dotted | $y = 0.41x^{0.88}$ | Notifications above this line are in the top quartile of notifications. |
| Purple, Dashed | $y = 0.283x^{0.842}$ | Notifications above this line and below the green line are in the 2nd quartile of notifications. Notifications below this line and above the red line are in the 3rd quartile of notifications. |
| Red, Dotted | $y = 0.238x^{0.789}$ | Notifications below this line are in the bottom quartile of notifications. |

Using these equations, institutions can effectively compare their notifications to notifications from other institutions, with similar recipient numbers, to determine how they compare. It should be noted that there are many more factors into an individual notification's success – and that these are only very general benchmarks.

For your convenience we have made a simple Excel file to calculate a notification's expected engagement, and how it compares with the above benchmarks.

## Institutions with Successful Notification Strategies

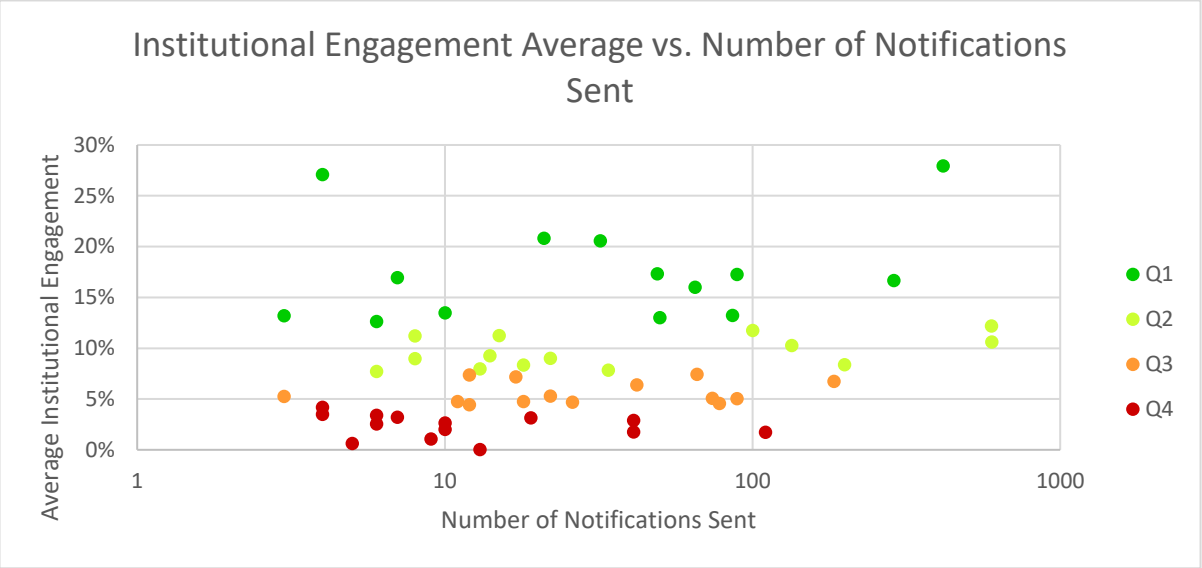
Now that we know the general trends, we wanted to compare the data for notifications with high notification engagement rates vs institutions that have low notification

engagement rates. I've divided the 56 institutions into 4 quartiles by Engagement, with 1 being the highest performing institutions, and 4 being the lowest performing institutions.

## More vs. Less Notifications

If an institution sends few notifications – does that make them more engaging because they are a rare event? Or does that make them less engaging because users aren't used to receiving communications via notification?

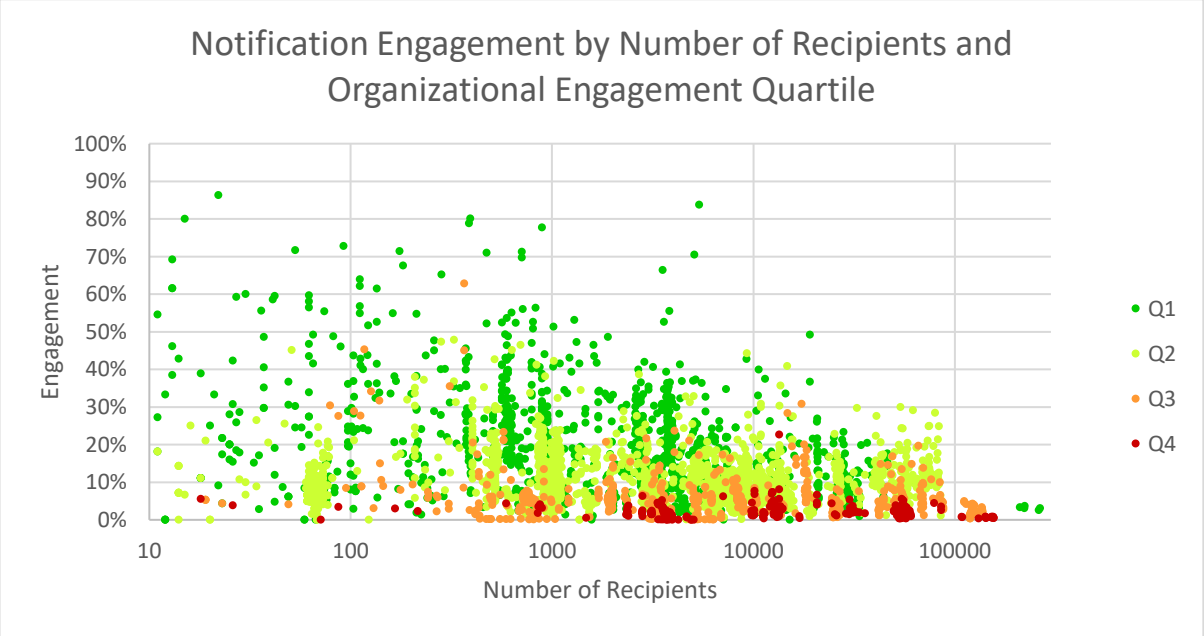
While the data shows that there is a weak correlation between the number of notifications an institution sends and how much engagement it receives, it's not very significant $(Spearman's\ \rho = 0.267,\ p < 0.05)$ .




Each dot represents one institution. The horizontal axis is logarithmic.

## Targeting Strategy

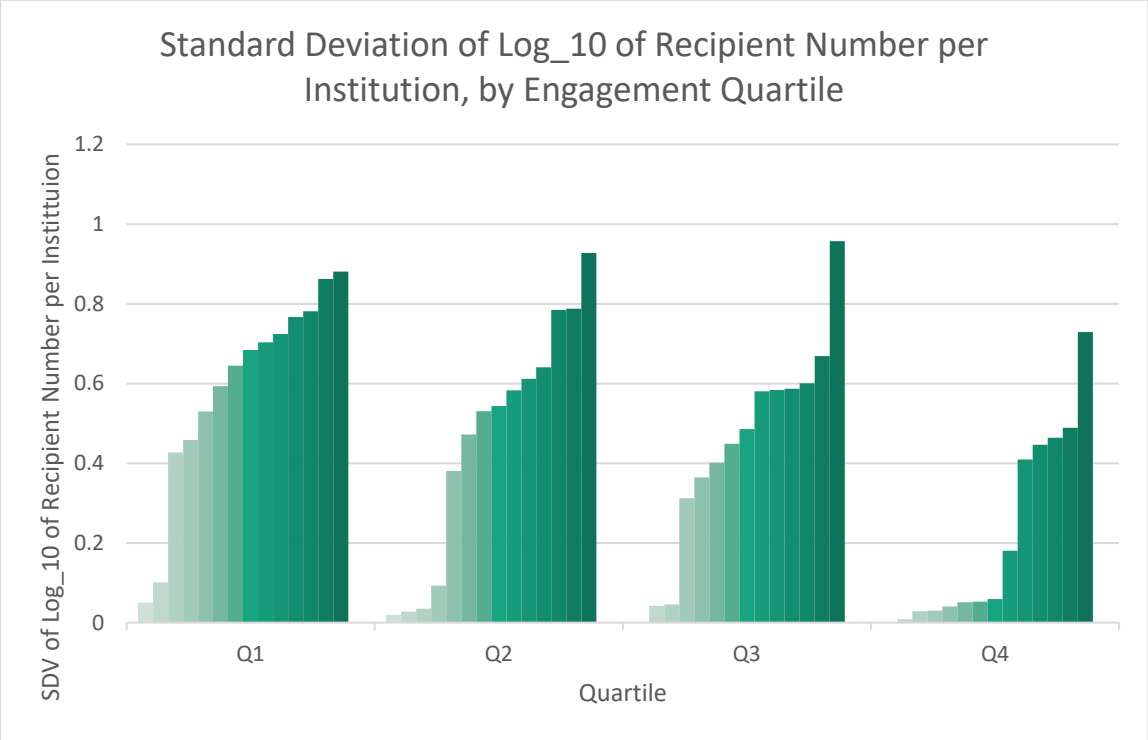
When looking at Engagement vs. the Number of Recipients again, we get a different picture when color-coding the data by institutional Quartile.




Each dot represents one notification. The horizontal axis is logarithmic for visibility.

Notifications from high-performing institutions are spread out on the horizontal axis. This means that they send notifications to groups of sizes that vary between different orders of magnitude. In contrast, notifications from low-performing institutions can be seen in clusters and more to the right of the graph. This means that these institutions target large groups almost exclusively, and don't vary their targeting very often – a majority of their notifications go out to similarly-sized larger groups.

To confirm this, I then ran another analysis and got an calculation that shows **how much institutions vary their targeting by size**. To normalize the data, I used the standard deviation of the logarithm (base 10) of the Recipient number, much like in many of the graphs above.




Institutions that score highly in this graph tend to send notifications to groups of varying sizes, while institutions that score poorly on this graph tend to not vary their targeting and send notifications to similarly-sized groups. **This means that we can see that low-performing institutions tend to have much less variance in their targeting when compared to higher-performing institutions.**

## Other Measures with No Effect Found

Upon exploring the data, we checked and found no effect for the following:

### Day of the Week

Other than the expected finding that institutions tend to send more notifications and get more engagement during weekdays (Mon-Fri) in comparison to the weekend (Sat-Sun), there was no day of the week that was found to perform significantly better than the others.

## Time of the Year

Many campusM metrics tend to go up when term starts and bottom out during breaks and holidays. We saw that indeed institutions send more notifications while students are on campus – but we saw no increase in the rate of engagement during campusM's high-usage times when compared to low-usage times. This is probably because notifications create their own usage by prompting the user from outside the app, and are less dependent on users being in the app to begin with.

We find that it's often more important to time a notification in relation to its specific context, rather than to time it for an outside metric. For example, if a notification is about an event happening on Wednesday evening – sending it on Wednesday would be more impactful that sending it on Monday, even if you find that notifications on Mondays tend to perform better.

## How Often Notifications are Sent

There was no discernible difference in overall engagement between institutions that sent notifications more often than those who sent notifications further apart. Our only recommendation is, therefore, that you stay consistent, and use the guidelines above to avoid spamming any one student by mistake.