

The 13 Best Email Subject Lines

Introduction...

Writing successful emails today requires creative headline writing. An email that isn't opened goes unread. But by writing effective email subject lines, you can routinely boost your average email open rates by 50 percent or more, and can instantly improve the profitability of any email marketing program.

The average Internet user is bombarded with dozens if not hundreds of email subject lines every day. Most of us have developed an anti-headline defense and tune out when we sense an email subject line is trying to sell us something.

For both news articles and advertising, 75 percent of your success is gated by your headline. If the headline does not convince the user to read on, all is lost. Email subject lines are the digital equivalent of print media headlines. The best email subject lines persuade the user to open and read the text messages that follow.

Like a good headline, a good email subject line is succinct. Some email clients such as AOL and Hotmail truncate the email subject line if it is longer than 45-51 characters. Other email clients permit up to 80+ characters. Generally, shorter email subject lines produce higher open and click-through rates. The objective of an email subject line is to persuade the reader to open the message and read the content.

Is your email subject line sufficiently intriguing to prompt the recipient to open your email newsletter or sales letter? Or do you "give away" the entire message in the email subject line, diminishing the subscriber's incentive to read any further?

Does your email newsletter or sales letter tell an interesting story or otherwise engage the reader's interest? Or does it simply provide nice-to-know information?

Does your email message contain quality information, offer a free downloadable report, provide a valuable tip, or point the subscriber to a useful website? Or will the subscriber simply feel she is "being sold to" and dismiss the message as unwanted advertising copy?

Does your email newsletter or sales letter leverage your brand? Does it provide links to other related information, products and services?

The strategic intent of an email marketing message is either:

1. lead generation,
2. increasing response rates or
3. customer retention.

Each email should require the subscriber to click through on a button, hypertext link, or navigational link to reach a page on your website.

The email subject line should be appropriate to the publisher's mission statement and should support the website's brand. If your book, newsletter, magazine, video, etc. is about kayaking, don't publish an email newsletter with a subject line solely about fishing, even if the larger story is about using the kayak to get to the fishing venue.

Supporting your brand is Job #1. All other considerations, including the cleverness of email subject lines, are subordinate to the integrity of your brand.

In other words, the email subject line is not creative if it prompts the recipient to open your email message, but subsequently disappoints, confuses, or worse, alienates the recipient.

Against that background, the following are thirteen email subject line archetypes that have been proven to be effective when used judiciously.

1. The KEYWORD Email Subject Line

Conventional search engine optimization wisdom says keywords are the most important aspect of a blog post title. If the blog post title doubles as an email subject line, then keywords are important.

But the blog post title and the email subject line don't necessarily need to be identical. The blog post title can be the topic headline of the email content after it is opened.

The email subject line can be some other combination of words that prompts the recipient to open the message. This strategy provides greater flexibility in writing email subject lines.

Nevertheless, keywords are keywords. We use them generously in subject lines, headlines and editorial copy because we know that customers search them and respond to editorial content that contains them. So using keywords in an email subject line is encouraged but not mandatory.

2. The URGENCY Email Subject Line

Using urgency in the subject line is a time-honored method of creating anxiety. Some people respond better to the threat of losing than to the promise of gaining.

Urgency subject lines are generally straightforward.

- ✓ Save 50 Percent Today Only.
- ✓ Early-Bird Registration Ends Friday.
- ✓ Last Chance to Send Your \$10.

3. The BENEFIT Email Subject Line

Professional copywriters know to emphasize benefits over features.

The benefits of my losing weight are enormous. My clothes will fit better. My feet won't hurt as much. My friends will stop calling me "Porky." I love the benefits of losing weight.

However, one of the features of losing weight is something my doctor calls a "diet." I have a lot less enthusiasm for this feature than I do the benefits.

Examples of the benefit subject line are everywhere. They generally contain an implied promise.

- ✓ Lose Weight While You Sleep.
- ✓ Earn \$90,000 a Year Repairing Cracked Windshields.
- ✓ Write a Blockbuster in 30 Days.

4. The HOW-TO Email Subject Line

The how-to subject line is more specific because it promises to reveal "how-to" achieve the benefit.

It is nearly impossible to write a bad how-to email subject line. Simply join a mouth-watering benefit to the words "how to."

- ✓ How to Write a Hit Song and Sell It.
- ✓ How to Raise Venture Capital without Risk
- ✓ How to Get 12 Hours Out of an 8-hour Day

Omitting the word "to" is also acceptable:

- ✓ How Millionaires Buy and Sell Gold
- ✓ How I Made a Fortune with a Fool Idea
- ✓ How a New Discovery Made a Plain Girl Beautiful

5. The FASCINATION Email Subject Line

Fascinations are compelling, benefit-driven bullet points that motivate the reader to discover the answer. Fascinations exploit the reader's curiosity. Often, fascinations include the words discover and secrets and amazing.

Fascinations can be used as email subject lines.

- ✓ The Amazing Diet Secret of a Desperate Housewife
- ✓ Discover the Ultimate Options Trading System.
- ✓ Creating Value Out of Conflict: 4 Strategies that Work

6. The LIST Email Subject Line

Readers love lists because lists comprise convenient summaries. Note that the document you're currently reading is a list.

Examples of list subject lines:

- ✓ 7 Prostate Cancer Warning Signs
- ✓ 6 Delicious Recipes for Squid
- ✓ 5 Secrets to a Greener Lawn

7. The INTRIGUING PROMISE Email Subject Line

Anyone with a curiosity quotient higher than room temperature can be intrigued and motivated to open an email.

But using the intriguing promise subject line absolutely requires that you fulfill the reader's expectations with information that at least partially satisfies his curiosity. The product you are offering must completely fulfill the promise.

Examples:

- ✓ The Lazy Man's Way to Riches
- ✓ Hidden Money: 17 Markets that Pay
- ✓ Wanted: People to Write Greeting Cards
- ✓ Banking Secrets that Banks Don't Want You to Know

8. The TEASER Email Subject Line

A teaser subject line is also intriguing, but without an implied promise beyond an engaging narrative. Teaser subject lines must be followed by an expertly crafted story that instructs or entertains, otherwise the reader will feel deceived.

- ✓ Do You Close the Bathroom Door When You're Home Alone?
- ✓ Last Friday I Was Scared...My Boss Almost Fired Me!
- ✓ Living Well for Less is the Best Revenge
- ✓ Soon, an Economic Emergency Could Wipe You Out

9. The QUESTION Email Subject Line

The linguistic structure of a question requires the reader to pause and respond. In other words, questions force us to think and answer. Question subject lines generally pull well. Examples:

- ✓ Would Self-Hypnosis Help You Achieve Your Goals?
- ✓ Will You Have Enough Money to Retire at 65?
- ✓ Tired of Making Your Boss Rich?
- ✓ Can This Marriage Be Saved?

Rhetorical questions are intended to provoke thought rather than prompt a specific answer.

- ✓ Are You An Over-Educated Under-Achiever?
- ✓ Is the Life of a Child Worth \$15 to You?
- ✓ Does Uncle Sam Owe You "Forgotten Money"?

10. The NEWS Email Subject Line

If your email offers something new, something your customer can't get elsewhere, consider the news subject line.

- ✓ Federal Home Loan Program Announced
- ✓ New iPhone "Visual Voice Mail"

- ✓ 10 IPOs that Could Double in 12 Months
- ✓ Gold Price Poised to Soar in 2009

11. The TESTIMONIAL Email Subject Line

Testimonials help convince buyers because they provide validation and social proof. While testimonials usually appear in the body copy of a sales letter, they can also be effective in the subject line.

- ✓ Why Arnold Palmer uses Quaker State Motor Oil
- ✓ More Alaskans drive on Michelins...
- ✓ Tiger Woods can afford any car; he drives a Buick.

Note: While “all caps” normally increases email open rates versus “standard upper and lower,” our testing reveals that the standard capitalization used above often wins when subject lines include names and other proper nouns.

12. The TARGETED Email Subject Line

This subject line is very direct in that it specifically identifies its intended audience.

- ✓ Attention Bostonians Who Need to Lose Weight
- ✓ For Investors Who Hate Paying Commissions
- ✓ Are You a Sales Pro Who Wants to Close More Deals?

Variations include:

- ✓ What Every Investor Must Know about IBM
- ✓ To the Road Warrior Who Hates to Travel
- ✓ For Mature Women Only
- ✓ Confidential to Corvette Owners

13. HYBRID and PERSONALIZED Email Subject Lines

All the email subject line archetypes can be used in combinations, and many can be personalized.

- ✓ Janice Morgan, your children can earn top grades.
- ✓ A stock portfolio for Justin Carver
- ✓ Bernie Madoff, happy with your stockbroker?