



Tell Me More: 10 Tips for Effective Subject Lines

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In today's e-mail-marketing world, the difference between e-mail success and failure can hinge on whether your target reader opens your e-mail or not. With so much at stake, you need to create the best first impression possible – through stronger, better, and more effective subject lines.

While subject lines are both an art and a science – and what works for one campaign may not for another – the good news is that there are a number of proven best practices you can use. This article discusses ten tactics for creating better subject lines – and better results for your next e-mail campaign.

#1. Keep it Short

As a rule of thumb, subject lines shouldn't be more than 60 characters total, including spaces. Yet to be more effective, yours should even be shorter than that. In a recent study by ClickZ and eMarketing.com, e-mails with 0-49 characters had an open rate 12.5% higher than those with 50 characters and more. This finding supports the notion that communicating a short, precise message is much more effective than sending one that could get cut off and confuse your reader.

#2. Avoid Spam Filters

F. Scott Fitzgerald once said that using an exclamation point is like laughing at your own joke. But it's no laughing matter in e-mail marketing – using more than one in a subject line will get you filtered. Other no-no's: using the dollar sign (\$), especially as the first character of your subject line, and capitalizing more than one word.

#3. Convey a Sense of Urgency

If you can make your reader feel like she just has to open your e-mail and act on it immediately, your job is done and done well. One way to elicit this emotion is to create a sense of urgency with time-bound offers – “September 25 is your last chance to register” – or even better, with time-bound incentives – “Your last chance to save 20% ends tomorrow.” These subject lines are clear, they're direct, and they're downright compelling.



#4. Personalize Carefully

Personalization has been overused to the point where if it's done incorrectly, it can turn your prospect off, particularly in B2B marketing. But if your company has a great brand and offers something your audience truly values, personalization can draw them. "Susan, Coach's annual sale is coming to your Scranton store," feels more like a trusted friend passing on valuable information as opposed to an unwanted sales call.

#5. Take Personalization to Another Level

Differentiate your message by personalizing subject lines with data other than your customer's first name. Consider creative ways to include the name of a product they just bought, a service they're interested in, or any other detail you have access to. Doing this well demonstrates marketing competence, helps to create credibility and trust, and of course, delivers a tailored e-mail your recipient will want to open.

#6. Include Your Company Branding

Most e-mail clients show the sender's name and company information in the recipient's e-mail inbox, so remember that your company name and branding is important to your audience. Be sure to include brand references in the subject line, such as your company name, products, or services. This helps create instant recognition and eliminate confusion that can lead to unopened e-mails.

#7. Communicate the Benefit of Your Message, Not Product Features

World-renowned marketing consultant Zig Ziglar is famous for saying "No one ever wants a ¼-inch drill bit. What they want is a ¼-inch hole." What he meant was to lead with the benefit your product delivers instead of the product itself. Understand your audience's pain and communicate the benefit or solution you can deliver. How you'll do it is not important yet; the first step is to let them know you understand their challenge and that you have the solution.

#8. Tease a Little

Effective marketers know how to use curiosity to their advantage. Consider a teaser approach like "You've never seen a catalog like this" to pique their interest. Another good approach is to use an ellipsis to trail off and create a mini-cliffhanger. "Just when you thought you knew it all . . ." Irresistible.



#9. Use Numbers

Consider it the David Letterman effect. Top-ten lists and other bite-sized chunks of practical content attract readers looking to get quick tips or recommendations. (After all, what made you read this article?) You can also use statistics and research in the subject line to quickly catch and hold attention. Finally when you use them, let the number stand instead of spelling them out. Forget what the Chicago Manual of Style tells you – space is at a premium and you need instant recognition to get your message across. Use every tool at your disposal.

#10. Frontload Content

Journalists use a tool called the inverted pyramid to convey the most important information at the beginning of a story. That way, if a reader leaves after just the lead, they still get all the critical details. Subject lines are no different. Consider bringing the most important details – such as the offer, incentive, or other call to action – into the subject line as opposed to the body of the e-mail where it may never be read.

As a final word of advice, you should think of these tools as arrows in your e-mail-marketing quiver, best fired one at a time and carefully, at that. You should always test – and test again and again! – to learn what approach works best and why. But with careful planning and proper execution, changing your subject-line approach can lead to better open rates and better results for your next e-mail campaign.