

# DON'T CLICK SEND!

5 EMAIL MARKETING MISTAKES THAT  
KILL RESPONSE  
(AND HOW TO AVOID THEM)



**BY GARETH JONES**

## Introduction

Whilst undertaking targeted direct response mailing campaigns remains an effective method of obtaining and maintaining revenue, the importance of email marketing has become impossible to ignore for any business navigating today's fast-moving digital landscape.

Not only is it much cheaper to undertake large-scale email campaigns when compared to the traditional paper-based approach, but it also currently offers *the* highest Return on Investment of any marketing channel.

Litmus Software Inc. report that 91% of consumers check their email at least once daily – and 66% of them have made a purchase as a result of an email that they received.

In fact, more consumers prefer to look for deals via email (44%) than directly on a company's website (43%)!

Email marketing Return on Investment and Click-Through Rate compared to other digital options is known to provide around **\$40 return per \$1 spent through an average CTR of 5%**.

To put that in perspective, keyword-based advertising offers an average return of **\$17 per \$1 spent**, whilst you can expect banner ads to return only **\$2 per \$1 investment and a click-through of just 0.8%**

So it's easy to see just how beneficial a well-written and capably targeted email campaign can be for business... if you get it right.

Here are a few common mistakes (in no particular order) that may be costing you some of those valuable opens and click-throughs in your own campaigns...

And, of course, how you can avoid making them again... and protect your bottom line as a result!

## Mistake #1: **You don't make your subject line a compelling teaser.**

Every day, our inboxes are inundated with countless emails... and very few of them are things we have been expecting or actively want to read.

Your subject line needs to be compelling enough to speak louder than the rest of the unread mail sitting next to it. Just like the envelope teaser or headline in a direct mail package, your subject needs to grab the prospect's attention immediately and draw them into the body of your email.

The quicker it does this, the better. Here are a few tips on crafting a winning subject line:

- Rather than outright stating your offer (unless, of course, it's intrinsically irresistible to your target prospect!), consider an approach that causes the reader to think "What comes next?" Storytelling techniques work strongly in this approach – your subject sets the scene, and natural curiosity takes over as the reader wants to know what happens next.
- Write with the "3/40 Rule" in mind – You have 3 seconds and 40 characters within which to grab your prospect's attention. Use this when coming up with prospective subject lines, then go back and compare them against each other within the constraints of the rule.
- People love lists. If your email contains a list, then make sure to have the subject to match, for example "Top 10 Ways To..." or "7 Great Ways To..." etc. A short list relevant to your prospect's interests has a high chance of getting read.
- Use the "4-U" technique for headlines. This means that you should try to ensure that your subject offers something Unique, is Ultra-Specific about what the email contains, is Useful in some way for the reader, and implies Urgency – that the email contains something they need to know *right now*, or a time-limited offer that will soon expire. If you can land all four elements, you will have an exceptionally compelling subject line on your hands.
- Many things will engage your prospect's curiosity – try adding elements of breaking news, fear, interesting facts, envy, scarcity and pressure for time to your subject line. If they click together, the reader will be very interested in what you may have to say.
- Consider simply using your product's "Big Promise" as the subject – the greatest benefit that the reader stands to gain from using your product. This guarantees

that any opens are indeed qualified prospects – leading to more quality leads from your click-throughs.

- Pay close attention to making the first sentence of your email highly relevant to your reader's needs. This is because, on many platforms, they may see that first line as a preview before they open your email. Tie the first line of your body copy into your subject line, make it relevant... and watch your open rate soar.

Remember that your email campaigns should be segmented so that different approaches are sent to different demographics. One set of prospects may need an entirely different subject line and email body content than another set, if they are to be sufficiently engaged.

Never simply change the subject line to something else while mailing the same main email to different groups. The subject should work in tandem with your email's body copy, telling a cohesive story – if the contents of the email itself bear little or no relation to what is promised in the subject line, your prospect will feel cheated, become completely disengaged, and you will lose their trust going forward.

## **Mistake #2: You don't speak to the reader as an individual.**

Even though your email marketing communications may be delivered to massive numbers of prospects as a result of your list building efforts, that doesn't mean they should be written as if they're addressing an audience.

In the majority of cases, they should address the individual.

When a prospect reads your email, they should feel as though they are in a direct dialogue with your company or representative – like you're sitting opposite each other over lunch.

Whether that's a business or casual lunch depends entirely on your market – but nonetheless, it should feel personal while remaining appropriate in language to the intended audience.

Your recipient group may be very large, but you aren't addressing them as one group. You aren't standing at the head of a great hall, announcing your special offer via megaphone.

You're sitting down with a single potential customer who has been gracious enough to offer you their time and consideration.

After all, there's only one person perched at that computer staring at their inbox.

Speak to them like it.

If you can, when obtaining addresses for your mailing lists, always try to capture the prospect's first name on sign-up. This will allow you to keep a personal greeting at the beginning of your emails.

This also highlights the importance of performing key demographic research before preparing the copy for your email marketing campaign(s). You can't be everything to everyone – so focus on your prime prospect profile and speak in their language.

If you don't... if you try to remain neutral and appeal to all... you're likely to truly connect with none.

## Mistake #3: **You don't offer anything new or valuable within the communication.**

If your email campaign is leveraging content in order to drive prospect engagement (and these days, it really should), there is one simple, two word question that you need to ask when it comes to reviewing what you're going to send.

That question is: "WHO CARES?"

If the content of your email allows your reader to ask that question, it'll be deleted along with all of the other useless junk that they've received that day.

You need to make sure that they care. You need to make them think. You need make them *want*.

That means offering information that is relevant to their interests and, preferably, new to them – so not only did they learn something interesting from your email, but you've *also* gotten in touch with what now looks like a very attractive offer for your product or service.

It's attractive because you've successfully wooed them, shown that you have their interests and desire for certain knowledge at heart, and your call to action will be met with much less resistance.

Think if you were mailing a great offer on discounted outdoor planters, for example.

You could mail a basic message stating your offer, and little else, alongside a call to action – akin to standing on the street shouting "Discount planters! Get your discount planters here!"

What kind of response do you think that would receive?

A downturned gaze, most likely.

... or you could offer relevant, interesting content. Going back to the subject line suggestion of lists – perhaps mail a link to a themed landing page or blog post on your site, listing "6 Beautiful Perennials You Ought To Grow".

The content would be pertinent to those with an interest in their garden, so they'll open the mail based on the intriguing subject line.

They will then feel happy about reading your relevant content, and will in turn be much more relaxed and receptive when it comes to the revelation of your offer.

And since the content matched your offer, they'll be more considerate about picking up this great deal on planters so that they can grow some of these gorgeous flowers you've revealed to them.

Oh, and guess what? They can also buy the flowers from you, too! (If you do happen to sell them, obviously.)

Tying content and offer together in a way that interests, engages and informs your prospect is a solid key to success.

And “content” doesn’t just mean “blog posts”. Content can be anything from an invitation to a helpful webinar, a link to a Facebook group or even a link to a new YouTube video – whatever works for you and drives engagement with your audience.

Offer nothing new and... well... *who cares?*

## Mistake #4: **You ramble.**

Blah, blah, blah.

Something about your business premises.

Blah, blah, blah.

Something about the history of your company.

Blah, blah, blah, blah.

A hint of your offer? Maybe?

Blah, blah, bl--

DELETE.

Your email copy should only be as long as it needs to be in order to get the point across.

That point is, primarily, your offer, the benefits that your product or service has for the prospect, and your call to action – telling the reader, in no uncertain terms, what you want them to do next.

Keep the copy on point throughout. Strip everything that interests only you as a business, or exists solely to self-aggrandise or stroke your professional ego.

Sadly, your prospect doesn't care about any of that – they only care about what value you have to offer their day, whether it's through knowledge, savings, entertainment or something else.

You need to let them know what they're getting out of reading your email – and you need to let them know quickly.

So make sure that your email sticks to a single point or theme – don't go off on irrelevant tangents, which will only dilute your message and decrease response – and include multiple calls to action, both early and later in the email.

Sure, if the email needs to be long, then it needs to be long – but you need to make absolutely sure that it isn't just long because you're waffling.

Save the more dense copy for your sales/landing page if you need to go into more detail. Your email should direct the recipient to click a link to be taken there for your pitch to continue. If you're looking for link clicks, then drop it 3 or 4 times within your body copy.

## Mistake #5: You don't indoctrinate new subscribers.

"Indoctrination???" I hear you cry. "I'm running a *business*, not a *cult*!"

Well, here's the skinny...

Indoctrination of your new subscribers is key to laying the foundations of a lasting relationship.

So what is an Indoctrination sequence?

Simply put, it's a series of 3 or 4 emails that your new subscribers will get in the days immediately after they sign up.

The first email should be sent as soon as they opt in. In this email, you frame the relationship – remind them of **why** they signed up (if you offered a specific lead magnet, then mention that), ask them to whitelist your email address(es) so they're sure to get your emails, and **tell them** how things will work going forward.

How often are you going to email them? What kind of content and value can they expect to get from you? Is there anything special they should do right now in order to get the most from their membership of your list? Tell them now.

Set the next emails in the sequence to be sent at the rate of one per day. In these follow-up emails, point the new subscriber toward your best existing content that's relevant to their interests.

Yes, this means that you'll need to create separate Indoctrination sequences if you offer lead magnets that are wildly different in topic or appeal to varying demographics.

But it's more than worth it just to have your brand new subscribers already warmed up before they're segmented off to your more general promotional sequences.

And don't be afraid to get personal in your second or third email. Drop in a photo of yourself or your CEO along with an interesting personal or professional story. Give your subscriber a peek behind the curtain – make them feel like a part of the family; like a close and welcome friend. Openness and trust are incredibly powerful selling tools.

This short, simple (and automated) effort will pay large dividends down the road. Don't skip it.

## Bonus Tip: **Avoiding the Spam filter**

Whilst your greatest challenge is getting through the personal spam filter of your recipient – which recognising when you are making the mistakes mentioned in this report will greatly help you to do – you must also contend with both server- and client-side technological spam filters.

If your email ends up in your prospect's Junk folder or – worse – trapped by their service provider's server-side filter, your chance of obtaining a solid lead or gaining response is roughly nil.

Here are a few handy tips on mistakes not to make when constructing your email, most of which will guarantee that your communication is flagged as unwelcome spam:

- Avoid starting your subject with the word 'Free', and especially 'FREE' (all caps)
- Avoid adding attachments to marketing emails
- In your Indoctrination sequence, ask subscribers to whitelist your addresses
- Don't use subject lines containing '!!!' or '???' or blank subjects
- Don't space out words in your subject, for example 't.h.i.s' or 't h i s'
- Don't send your email as one large HTML or image block, if you can avoid it. Microsoft Outlook, for example, by default will remove additional embedded elements until the reader enables them. Many recipients will simply delete the email without bothering to load the body elements. You could have the best call to action in the world... but they aren't even going to see it if it's wedged in a huge image.
- Avoid typical spam and marketing phrases such as "Lose Weight Easily!" or "Get Rich Tomorrow!". Reword these kinds of benefit (eg. with a list/content combo).
- Numbers in the sender's email address (greg593@email.com) are often flagged as potential spam. Use a solely alphabetical sending address.
- Avoid typical selling phrases in the body of your email. For example, "what are you waiting for?", "while stocks last!", "money back guarantee!", "a million dollars" and similar phrases are often picked up automatically as 'marketing speak' and resigned to the Junk folder. If you need to use these, insert them as an image rather than body text.
- Don't write your email in ALL CAPS. Not only is it difficult to read and aggressively presented to the recipient, but spam filters will jump straight on it.

## About the Author

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With nearly a decade of experience writing content and copy within the film industry, he also specialises in direct marketing for fundraising and sales and consumer and corporate case studies, using persuasive storytelling methods to increase response and drive revenue.

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