Email Subject Line Guide

How to craft effective subject lines to boost email open rates.

By Kath Pay
Marketing Director, cloud.IQ

Subject Line Guide

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ONE
Introduction

The beauty of Email being a Push Channel is that we can benefit from being able to send messages at appropriate times in the consumer's lifecycle – we don't have to wait for them to come to us. One of the beneficial outcomes of this is that more often than not, email is one of the main drivers of traffic to your website.

Another benefit is the branding exposure we receive from sending emails. This is called the Nudge Effect. The success of an email doesn't always end with a click. Email pushes the consumer to other channels directly and it often begins and ends with the subject line. If you've carefully crafted the subject line it may drive them directly to the website or even if they've deleted the email, more often than not, they've read the subject line before doing so and this will have an impact when in a couple of weeks, they remember your subject line and go to your website.

With that in mind, this email subject line guide will help you craft the outstanding subject lines needed to attract opens from your email recipients. It will cover what a great subject line involves and what should be avoided when creating subject lines. As well as this it will look at how to achieve 'longitudinal wins' with your subject line and what should be considered when crafting subject lines for mobile. More advanced areas reviewed by the guide invclude how to utilise gap theory, social proof, scarcity, loss aversion and emotion to create persuasive subject lines and how to optimise subject lines via testing and analytics.

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About Kath Pay Marketing Director, Cloud.IQ

Kath lives and breathes marketing, she is not only a world renowned speaker but practices her art in the senior management team and as the Marketing Director of e-commerce conversion experts - cloud.IQ. She is one of the World's Top 50 Email Marketing Influencers (Vocus, 2014).

Kath is recognised as the UK's leading Email Marketer Trainer and heads up training on Personalisation and Email Marketing for Econsultancy and Email Marketing for Emarketeers.

Some of the retail and B2C brands she has either trained or helped are: Bally, Barbour, Paul Smith, Ocado, EE, Dyson, Marks and Spencer, Wallis, Schuh, Co-operative Group, Argos, Next, Asda, Jaeger, Mont Blanc, Expedia, Net-a-Porter, Secret Escapes, George, Dixons, Bookatable, ShopRush, Adobe, Facebook, VisitScotland – just to name a few.

About Cloud.IQ

Cloud.IQ offer powerful remarketing and conversion solutions proven to increase online sales by up to 20% and email opt-in's by 300%.

You can deliver a personalised customer experience through retargeting emails and overlays, effectively targeting visitors who have either abandoned their shopping basket or are about to leave your website before purchasing.

Easy to use via your own dashboard, the cloud.IQ suite of tools are very easy to set up, simple to use and affordable; no hidden extras – just a fixed monthly fee and no fuss.

Real-time analytics captures the entire customer journey to provide crucial insights, used to optimise your conversion campaigns for optimum results.

cloud.IQ helps many types of businesses such as Wowcher, Smythsons and Space.NK to drive incremental sales. You can get started today with the FREE cloud.IQ siteAnalyser tool – no obligation to buy, so it costs nothing to find out how much more you could be selling.

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TWO
3 steps to conversion

There are 3 steps to achieving conversions within email marketing and it's necessary to get each of them right as they can all impact (either positive or negative) the success of your email marketing campaign. All too often when we talk about email marketing we simply consider the email, however, email marketing is much more than that. There is a 3 step process to achieving conversions within email marketing and all 3 steps are as impactful as each other – so be sure not to neglect any of them!
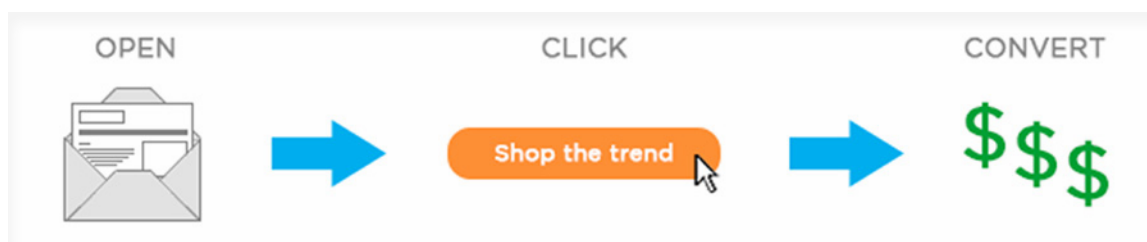
Yes, this first step is an obvious but crucial one. If we fail at this point, the likelihood of steps #2 and #3 being successful are dramatically reduced. We need to ensure that we give the email the best chance possible to be actioned and the first step is to craft an effective subject line.

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THREE
A great Subject Line involves…

> Focusing on your objective

Focusing on the objective will help you to ensure you're attracting the right audience with your subject line. I also encourage you to write it down, as the act of writing it and having it at hand, will help you to stay focused when crafting content and call-to-actions for the email, identifying what test you may want to perform within the email campaign, as well as what the success metric should be for the campaign.

Strategy Recommendation 1 Craft your subject line immediately after writing your objective

The simple act of creating (or should I say 'crafting') your subject line first, will help you to stay focused on the objective of the email, and as such assist you to achieve better results. Over the years I've trained hundreds of email marketers and 90% of them admit that they save writing the subject line until a few minutes before we push 'send', which results in a hurried and potentially ineffective subject line.

By writing the subject before you do anything else you are not only allowing yourself the time to craft a persuasive and effective subject line, but you are also using the subject line to prepare the framework of a persuasive email designed to get the reader to take the next action.

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> Think Tweet-style

I regularly survey email marketers who also manage social media profiles and they confirm that they spend more time crafting a tweet that will be seen by 50 followers than they do crafting a subject line that could be seen by 50,000 email subscribers.

When put like this, it's obvious that not only should you continue spending the time crafting your tweets but you should apply that time plus more when crafting your subject line.

Not only this, but we can use the learnings gained from analysing our tweets to determine what configuration of wording resonates best with your audience.

> Types of Subject Lines

There are many types of subject lines that can be used. Here are some of recent subject lines from my inbox:

- ☑ **Teasers** "We won't skirt around this"

- ☑ **Statement** "Step into our arrivals lounge"

- ☑ **Question** "Fancy 30% off?"

- ☑ **Informational** "Brands on sale! Get up to 30% off Nike, Cheap Monday, Adidas, Calvin Klein + more"

- ☑ **Call-To-Action** "SALE! Up to 50% off, SHOP NOW!"

All of the above tactics (and more) can be used to create an effective subject line. The art is not using the same tactic continually as it will begin to wear thin on your audience and lose its effectiveness. Variety is key to success – otherwise something similar to 'banner blindness' may kick in and a once successful subject line may start to be ignored if seen too often.

> What to avoid

Avoid crafting a subject line that grabs attention but doesn't fulfill the promise that it made. Many of you have probably read emails and blogs that have catchy 'click-bait' subject lines or titles that lure you into reading the email/blog – yet leave you feeling disillusioned as the subject line/title was misleading and what was promised in the subject line/title was not delivered in the content of the email/blog.

Remember, your subject line not only needs to grab the attention of your subscribers, but it is a promise as to what is inside. It's better not to gain their attention than to disappoint. This can have a long-lasting effect, as it's an emotion, and trust is a hard thing to earn in the first place, and even harder to regain.

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FOUR
Be the Director

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Strategy Recommendation 2 Use the CURVE Method

Use at least two elements from the CURVE Method created by Alex Williams (@ *alexcwilliams*)

C URIOSITY

U RGENCY

R ELEVANCE

V ALUE

E MOTION

☑ **Curiosity** - When used correctly, it is a powerful element. Curiosity can be used as a trick that doesn't pay off for the subscriber after opening. Repeated trickery with your subscribers is a major no-no.

☑ **Urgency** - Urgency is one of the oldest tricks in the marketer's playbook. However you can't tell people to "Hurry!" all the time or they will tune you out. Urgency, when combined with relevancy or value, is extremely powerful.

☑ **Relevancy** - Why did your subscribers originally sign up to you? Was it because of your offers, or because they bought a product from you? Relevancy is all about ensuring that you're meeting their expectations.

☑ **Value** - Value doesn't necessarily equate to money or savings. It can be defined as having relative worth, merit, or importance. This could be the value your product/services provides the consumer with in their lives and relationships. More often than not, Value trumps Relevance, as something can be relevant but not of value to the consumer, whereas something that is of value is almost always relevant.

☑ **Emotion** - Emotion is about being authentic with the emotions you are trying to convey with your subject line, and try to engage the consumer's emotions within the subject line.

Here are some examples from brands who have 2 or more CURVE elements within their subject lines.

Curiosity & Relevance

Joanna at Copy Hackers: 3-column vs 1-column layouts – which one won?

Value and Urgency

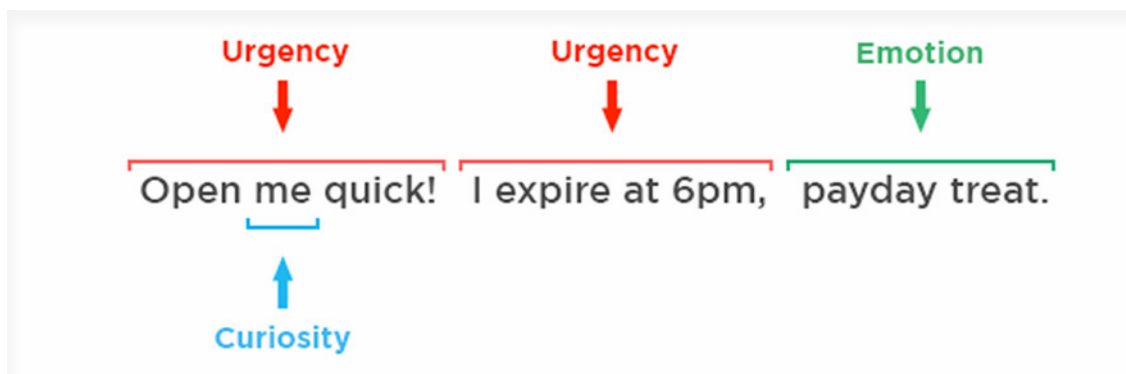Cloud.IQ: 9 reasons to open, click and tune in: Brand new eCommerce training for FREE. Limited spaces, just 7 days to go!

Emotion and Urgency

MAC Cosmetics UK: Don't Miss Out! Your Free Treat is Inside!

The below example from ASOS uses Curiosity in the form of personification, Urgency and Emotion.

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> Don't make them work hard to achieve your (or their) objective

Sometimes we can be too cryptic and ask our consumers to do mental gymnastics when working out our offers or the benefits to themselves.

La Redoute	Does £50 off £100 sound good?
Joanna at Copy Hackers	Take $50 off 'cos, y'know, it's nice to

One of the main ingredients of a successful subject line is to package up the subject line so that it is customer-centric and not brand-centric and is therefore easily digested by the reader enabling them to quickly determine the value the email conveys.

All too often, we'll present the features rather than the benefits to the consumer, and expect them to do the conversion themselves. As marketers, we need to do the heavy-lifting and not expect the consumer to do it, as the chances are, if it's not immediately obvious, they'll bounce off the email.

For example:

Brand-Centric: Our sale is on! We have hundreds of items discounted! Don't miss out!

Customer-Centric: Here's your chance to save $$$! For 24 hours only. Don't miss out on bagging yourself a bargain.

As you can see the first version is very brand-centric and uses the words 'our' and 'we', whilst the second version uses 'your' and 'yourself'.

With a tiny bit of thought you can turn this feature-led subject line into being a benefit-led subject line. Simply state the feature (Our sale is on!) and ask yourself "So What?" This leads you to answer it with the benefit (Here's your chance to save $$$!).

Below is an example of a brand-centric preheader and a missed opportunity.
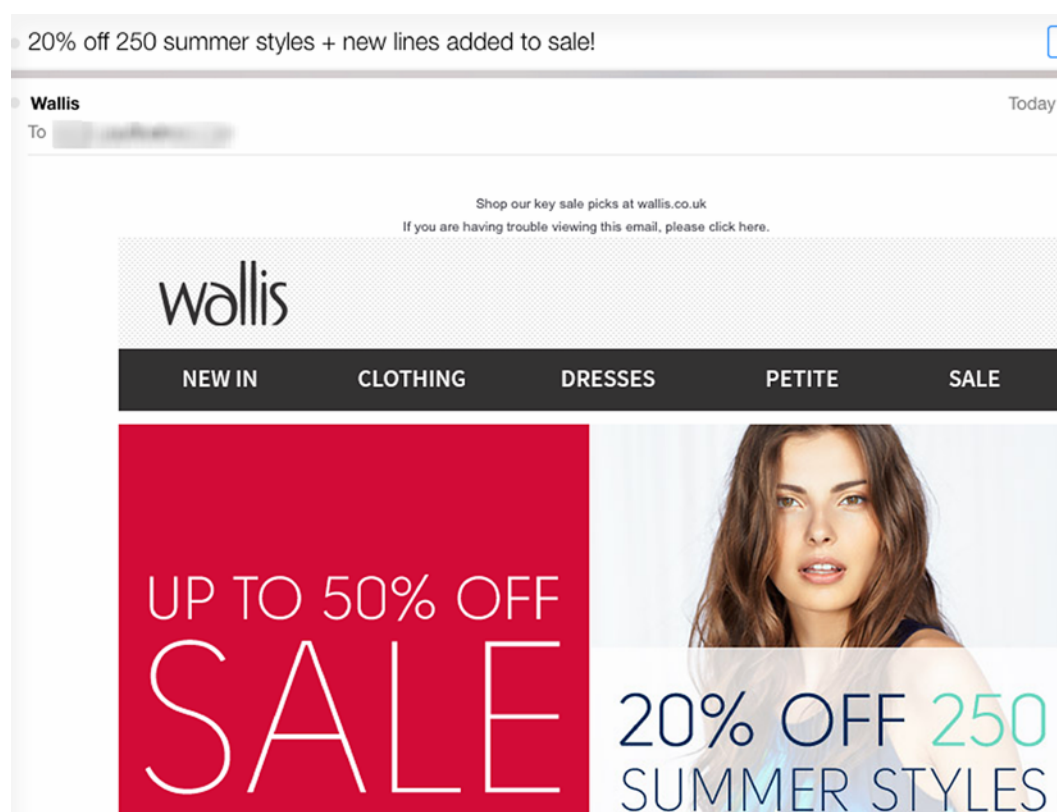
Preheader: "Shop our key picks at wallis.co.uk"

A simple way to convert a feature as written above into being a benefit is by simply asking yourself "So what?"

So taking this example we state the original feature: 'Shop our key picks at wallis.co.uk' and then ask 'So what?' This then forces us to identify the benefit 'Pick up a great bargain for yourself"

The subject line and preheader then when read together would say:"20% off 250 summer styles + new lines added to sale! Pick up a great bargain for yourself"

We can see below two examples of subject lines from my inbox, both offering 50% off, but one is brand-centric and the other is customer-centric:

Brand-centric: Laura Ashley - Up to 50% off home & fashion! View our sale catalogue online now!

Customer-centric: Jaeger - It's sale time: enjoy up to 50% off

Here's a wonderful example from whichtestwon.com of the uplift that can be gained by using a benefit-centric subject line over a brand-centric one. The benefit-driven, Version A increased leads by 62%

Version A: Increase Customer Retention by 8% in a Single Month

Version B: SaaS Billing is a Marketing Asset

> Rule of 3

The rule of three is one of the oldest in the book. Aristotle wrote about the three unities in his book Rhetoric: dramatic unity of time, place and action.

Simply put, people tend to easily remember three things, thus making your messages sticky and engaging.

Throughout the years it's been used from rhetoric to religion.

The Latin phrase "*omne trium perfectum*" (everything that comes in threes is perfect, or, every set of three is complete) conveys the same idea as the 'rule of three', while also (appropriately) using exactly three words.

It's all to do with patterns - At the root of its success is we, as humans, have been programmed to learn from patterns and 3 is the smallest pattern that can be made.

Throughout history it has been used to communicate complex ideas simply – think of memorable phrases such as:

☑ "Blood, sweat and tears"

☑ "Faith, Hope and Charity"

☑ "Lights, camera, action"

When packing our subject lines into topics of threes we create something that is memorable: think of "*It's as easy as 1,2,3*" & "*It's as easy as A,B,C*".

Here are some live examples and note for clarity, they use the pipe "|" for separation of each topic.

Practical Ecommerce	Shopper's Devices	SEO Landing Pages	Color Tools
Bookatable	Touchscreen tables	Art Deco dining	Bottomless champagne

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FIVE
Get their attention

Best Practice Tip 1 Encourage action by frontloading verbs in your subject line

Using action words motivates us humans to perform an action. Because they're often a direction or invoke action, our eyes are drawn to these exciting words, so be sure to frontload verbs in your subject line. Experiment with different verbs to discover what verbs resonate well with your audience. Some direction-oriented verbs are: "take," "download," "reserve," "ask," "buy," etc.

Keep in mind too, that many verbs perform a dual service and contain the benefit as well – these are powerful verbs. Some examples are; prevent, simplify, maximise, succeed, increase – don't be shy about testing what works best for you.

With an average of 50% of a brands emails being viewed on mobiles, we want to ensure we're having an impact on our mobile audience as well, and benefits of front-loading the verbs on mobile devices are clear. With Apple devices truncating subject lines, it's important to ensure the most impactful words will be seen.

I love iMedia Connection's use of front-loading verbs in the below subject lines. "Meet", "Win" and "Become"

iMedia Connection	Meet your brand advocates
iMedia Connection	Win the ad war with widgets
iMedia Connection	Become an interactive storyteller
iMedia Connection	Branded social strategy: easy as 3+3
iMedia Connection	The truth about ad network transparency
iMedia Connection	Confessions of an online ad buyer

For further inspiration, I've included the below live examples from brands in my inbox who are front-loading the verbs in their subject lines.

Sticky Content	Learn to write effective digital content	Save £50 when you book by Friday June 12
Ignite 2015	Learn How to Build High-converting Product Pages
Avon	What's new? Discover our latest arrivals

> Craft your subject line for longitudinal wins as well as immediate wins

Subject lines have an extremely important job to do – not only for the immediate conversions but they also have an impact on longitudinal results.

The UK DMA's Email Tracking Report 2014[1] shows that when a consumer receives an

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[1] http://www.dma.org.uk/research/email-tracking-report-2014

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interesting email, they do more than just click. 45% save the email for later and 38% bear the information in mind for later. Your subject line plays an important role in whether they do either of these actions.

3. Engagement and action

3.1 Actions taken when receiving an interesting email
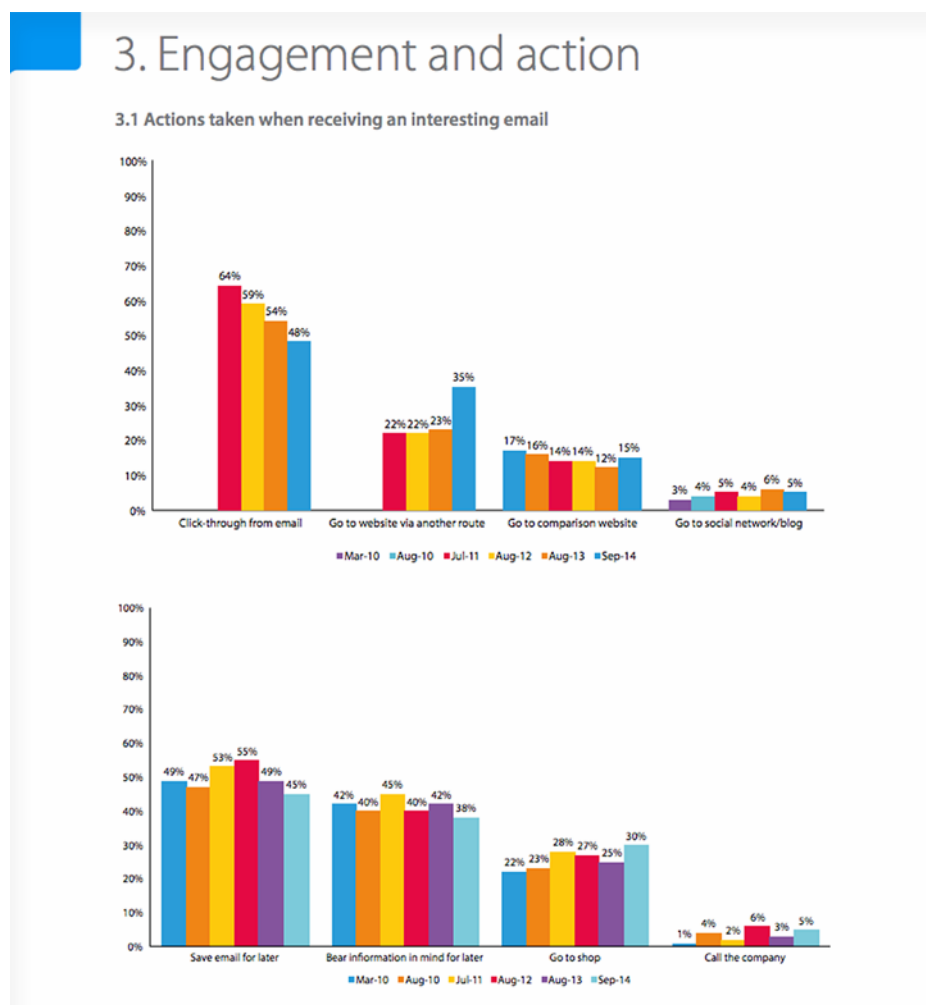
So craft your subject line so that the benefits are clear and memorable, enabling you to avail yourself of the longitudinal benefits of a well-crafted subject line.

As we can see with the below email from Soak&Sleep, not only are they using two elements of the CURVE Method - urgency and value, but they're also being very specific and clear about what the email contains.

Soak&Sleep	Final 24hrs Now On! 20% Off Everything with code xxxxx – Last Chance!

This subject line has been designed not only for the immediate sale and uses urgency to drive immediate sales, but also for longitudinal wins. Even if the consumer deletes the email as they don't have a current need for any products from this brand, the value is very clear and has been absorbed by the consumer as they delete.

The key to achieving this is to use the CURVE Method and be very specific with your subject lines – you want to end up with a subject line that very clearly reveals the benefit and hooks them into reading the subject now – even though they may not action for weeks or months.

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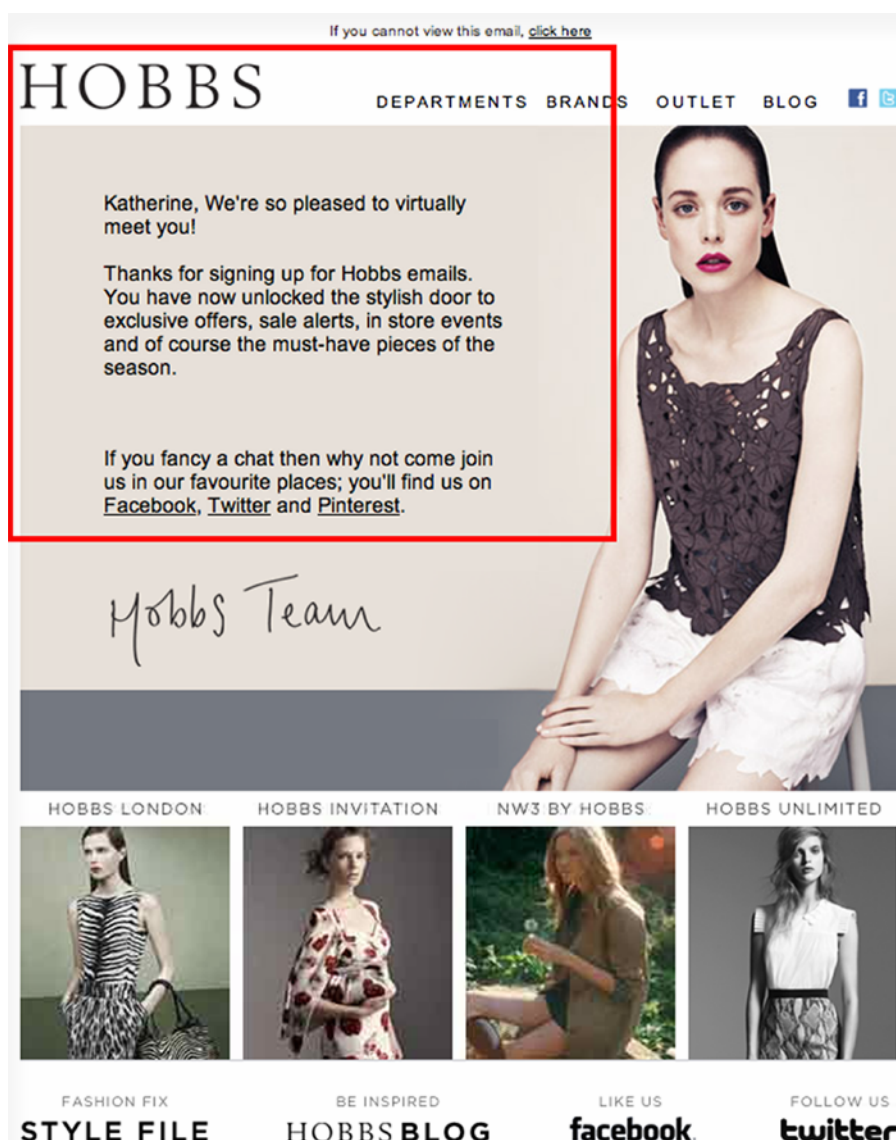5. ATTENTION

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> Use the Golden Real-Estate Wisely

Many email clients have preview panes, which can be set by the consumer to being either vertical or horizontal. We can use these preview panes to support the subject line and help to covert the consumer to opening and reading the email – however, considering the use of each style is about 50/50, which do we design for? Horizontal or Vertical?

Strategy Recommendation 3 Design your email around the top left corner

I suggest we design for what I call, The Golden Real-Estate, which is the left corner of the email. This area, as seen below, is the common denominator between both the vertical and the horizontal preview panes.

We need to be very smart with the content that we put in this area, as after being intrigued by our subject line, many of our subscribers will look to this area to determine whether they want to know more – so don't waste this opportunity.

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> Think mobile

The Preheader area is often broken into what I like to call, the Marketing Preheader and the Functional Preheader. The Functional Preheader is the line that links to a web browser version/preference centre/whitelisting etc. – it is functional by nature.

The Marketing Preheader however can be used to build upon the subject line – especially in the case of iPhones, where the subject line has been truncated.

I've have used a traffic light colour system below to indicate which are good and which could be improved.
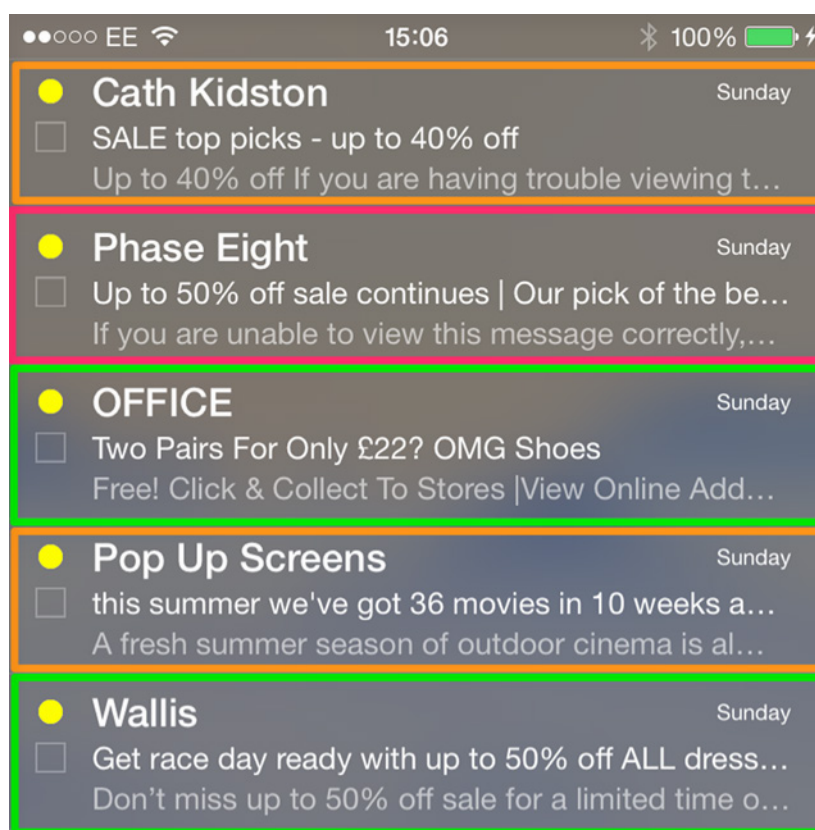
☑ **Cath Kidston** – Whilst they're using the Marketing Preheader "Up to 40% off", it simply repeats the same offer that's in the subject line rather than building upon it.

☑ **Phase Eight** – Unfortunately Phase Eight is missing a big opportunity here and are only using the Functional Preheader.

☑ **OFFICE** – This is a good use of the subject line and they use the Marketing Preheader to build upon the subject line nicely.

☑ **Pop Up Screens** – Whilst they use the Marketing Preheader, it could be tightened up a bit to be more impactful. i.e. "Join us for our outdoor cinema's"

☑ **Wallis** – Although Wallis is repeating the offer within the Marketing Preheader, they've added Loss Aversion to it with "Don't miss up to…" which makes the repetition worthwhile.

> Ensure there's no disconnect and everything flows

As mentioned above, the subject line can work together with other elements of the email in order to convince the subscriber to read the email. Disconnects between the subject line and content should be avoided, as this will just confuse the subscriber and cause them to leave.

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So even though the subject line may have spiked their interest, it doesn't result in conversions due to this disconnect.

Subject lines offers a promise and set expectations and the email delivers on this promise.

Looking at the below example we can see that they've used the subject line, the marketing preheader (3 lines of it!) and the body copy to persuade the subscriber to take action on this exclusive, email only offer.

As this is a very image-heavy email, the Marketing Preheader craftily provides those subscribers with images blocked, the ability to easily take advantage of the offers without having to download images.

Subject Line: An exclusive pass to shop SALE early

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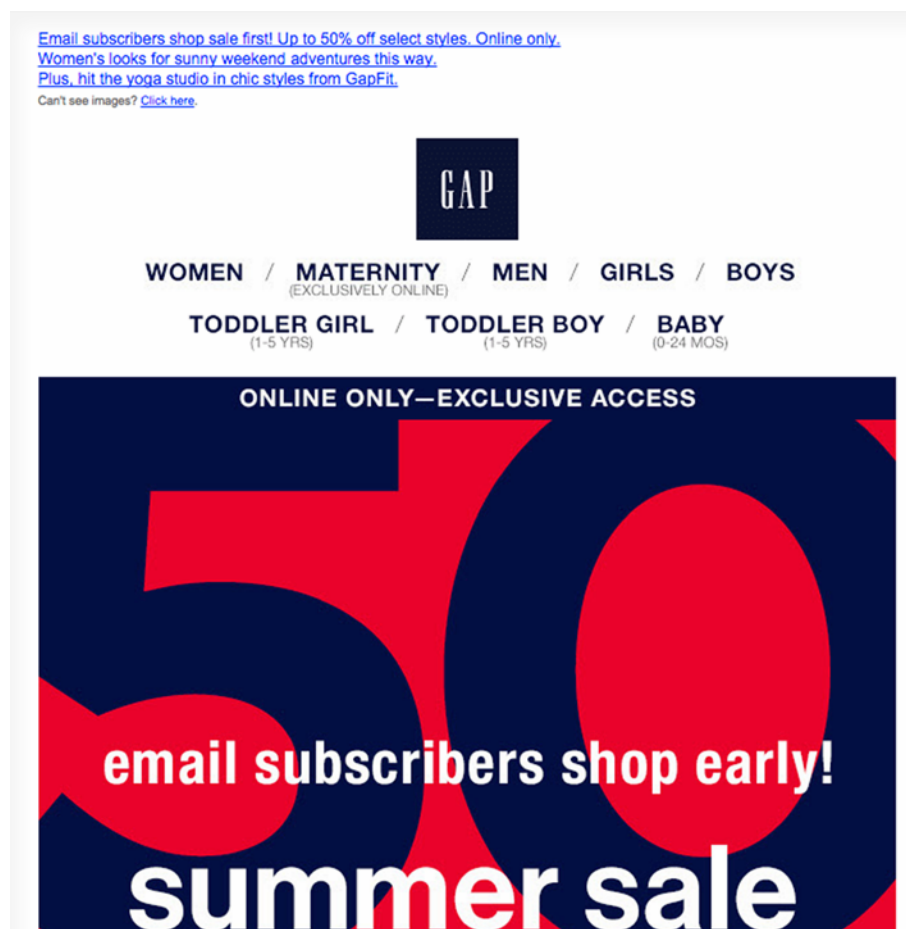
SIX
Persuasion

With email being a push channel we have to work harder, as it often means our audiences are in different mindsets depending upon the channel through which they found the offer.

For example, with a pull channel -- let's take a website -- customers are there because they have a mission to fulfil. They're motivated to look, buy or research in order to accomplish their mission.

Whereas with a push channel such as email, we're pushing our offer to them and suggesting "Would you like this?" "How about considering that?" Which often means that customers are closer to the top of the funnel in the buying journey, since they were not intentionally searching for that product.

As the consumer isn't necessarily actively looking for our products, offers and content as they do with a pull channel, using persuasion is key in the subject line, as we need to actively persuade them into opening up the email to read more.

> Gap Theory

George Loewenstein, a professor at Carnegie Mellon, discovered that when there is a gap between what we know and what we want to know, we will take action to fill that gap. It is referred to as the Information Gap Theory.

According to Loewenstein, curiosity is rather simple: It comes when we feel a gap "between what we know and what we want to know". This gap has emotional consequences: it feels like a mental itch and we want to scratch that itch, and closing the gap is how we scratch that itch.

Strategy Recommendation 4 Use people's natural curiosity to boost open rates
We can craft subject lines that leverage this information gap theory. Some good examples of the gap theory in action are below:

Practical Ecommerce	How Well Do You Know Adaptive Web Design?
Market Motive	Why great marketers are like great doctors

> Social Proof

Robert Cialdini, the author of *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* states "People see an action as more appropriate when others are doing it".

This principle relies on the adage "safety in numbers." For example, we're more likely to work late if our colleagues are doing it, put a tip in a jar if it already contains money, or eat in a restaurant if it's busy. We are simply assuming that if others are doing it, then it must be OK.

Ask yourself – when driving have you ever joined the long cue rather than the short cue as you felt that it was the 'safer' cue. This in effect similar to 'herd mentality' and we can harness this to our benefit….yes, even within our subject lines!

As we can with the below subject line from Avon, it's drawing upon social proof by revealing

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what other customer's love as well as assuming because they do, you also do.

Avon	What you're loving! Customer faves revealed..

> Scarcity & Loss Aversion

Humans have two main drivers – to avoid pain or to gain pleasure. These two drivers are key to every action we take and when we're faced with either the fact that their availability is limited or we might lose the ability to acquire them on favourable terms, then they appear more attractive to us. This is why we tend to act quickly when we're told that this is the last one, or that the special offer won't last.

Studies have proven that we're more likely to act based upon loss (avoid pain) than gain (gain pleasure). This is because gains are fleeting and losses linger. People behave irrationally to avoid loss. So to take advantage of this, promote your product's limited quantity.

The below example from Avon not only provides both urgency and value (2 elements from the CURVE Method) in their subject line, but they also carry the urgency and value through to the email content and have also thrown in some social proof with their "Top Rated by you".

ONE DAY SPECIAL: Half price Anew Clinical Infinite Lift Dual Eye System!

Rush Hair has a lovely example of scarcity below – "For the first 100 only..", whereas LinkedIn

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provide a great example of loss aversion "Offer expires in 7 days".

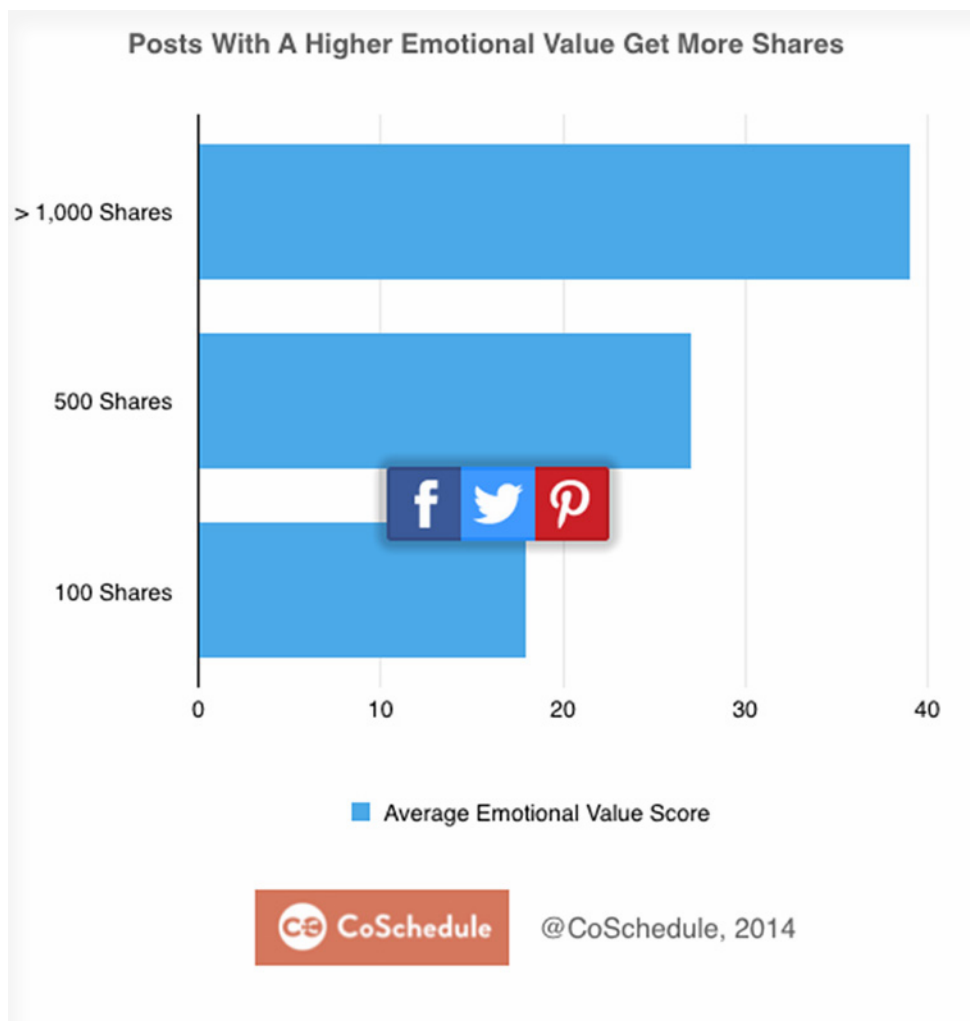| Rush	For the first 100 only - Free Kérastase bundle
Linkedin	Kath, we acquired Lynda.com – get 21 days free access! – *Offer expires in 7 days*

> Emotion

Albert Einstein said: *"The rational mind is the humble servant, the intuitive mind the faithful gift. We have created a society that honors the servant, and has forgotten the gift."*

As humans, we tend to pride ourselves in thinking we consciously make decisions by carefully analyzing all the information available and then deciding what the best option is.

However, like it or not, we subconsciously make purchasing decisions based upon our emotions and then we post-rationalise these decisions to come up with a suitable reasoning as to why we made that decision.

Therefore, we as marketers need to engage our consumers emotions first, then they will come up with a rational justification to support their decision. Once they've made a decision (based upon emotion) it's harder for them to backpedal. Their thinking falls in line with their emotions.

By using an Emotional Marketing Value (EMV) to rate the emotional content within headlines using their analytics tool, CoSchedule analysed 1 million headlines on their database and they found that emotional headlines get many more shares.

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Posts With A Higher Emotional Value Get More Shares

@CoSchedule, 2014

They reviewed and graded 2 headlines - a new and an existing one for their EMV rating.

Existing Headline: 7 Ways Your Brand Can Benefit from Content Curation (EVM 12%)

New Headline: 7 Ways You Will Benefit Through Content Curation (EVM 38%)

Why is it better? Replacing 'can' with 'will' adds confidence and assurance. Replacing 'your brand' with 'you' makes it personal.

Below are a few subject lines that call upon emotions to make them a success.

QHotels Summer Sale	Exclusive Pay Day Treat
American Express	Your delightful summer offers are inside
Hobbs	Exclusive: shop the sale before anyone else

A test from whichtestwon, shows that the more personalized, customer-oriented message — with the use of the words "your" and "bonus" — lifted conversions by 24%, compared to the descriptive subject line "Extra minutes to call home on Ramadan".

Version A – The email subject line stated: "Extra minutes to call home on Ramadan!"

Version B – The email subject line stated: "Your Ramadan Bonus is here!"

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SEVEN
Optimise Continually

> Create a Hypothesis

A hypothesis can be proved or disproved. It pretty much says, "I think by making this change, it will cause this effect." So, based on your results, you should be able to say "this is true" or "this is false."

For example:

"An emotional question in the Subject Line will generate more sales than a directive statement"

A hypothesis helps you to create a meaningful test and therefore meaningful results are more likely to occur. By using a hypothesis the chances of gaining a statistically significant result are much higher, as you've taken the time to consider what it is that you're testing rather than just simply creating two random, adhoc subject lines.

> Aggregation of Marginal Gain – create building blocks.

The GB cycling team's winning philosophy is "aggregation of marginal gains": get a lot of small things right, put them all together, and they add up to a significant gain. Using this philosophy they won both the Beijing Olympics as well as the London Olympics.

Best Practice Tip 2 Constantly test and review results and tweak accordingly

The goal of a test is not just to get a lift, but to get a learning as well…

Think of every email sent as being a customer survey of your target market - because in essence, that's what you are doing. When you grasp this concept, you'll see how you can take advantage of this and ensure that every email sent contains a test of some kind.

In fact, we can be even more precise and ask our lifecycle segments what they like best. In doing so, we may find out that our prospects prefer percentage-off offers, whilst our customers prefer exclusive offers.

However, testing provides you with more accurate responses than a survey, as the old saying goes, "Actions Speak Louder Than Words". Therefore you may find that front-loading verbs in your subject line resonates well with your audience – so start to build upon this and discover if certain verbs work better than others.

Once you've identified the verbs that work best, you can then start to test other hypotheses to add to your building blocks. You can only do this when using hypotheses and of course recording all the tests and hypotheses that you use. Performing ad-hoc tests to simply see which one works best will become a thing of the past.

> Measure the correct metric for success

All too often we get lured into thinking the objective of the email is to gain as many opens as possible but in most cases, this is not so…. more likely than not it will be event registration,

downloads, product purchase etc. So by keeping focused on the objective of the email (i.e. conversions) we'll be more likely to craft subject lines that attract the audience that is most likely to convert, rather than simply attracting a larger audience who convert at a lower rate.

Here's an example of a subject line test performed by Veet. We can see that the subject line that achieved the highest open rates actually had the lowest conversions (entries to the competition). However, the subject line with the highest conversions, achieved this with the lowest open rates. Therefore, if we were to have gone with the open rate as being the successful metric – which is the most popular metric to measure subject line success - we would have lost out on conversions, which is the objective of this campaign.

So by focusing on the objective and understanding which metric matters the most to the success of the email, you're more likely to achieve greater success. Generally speaking, the subject line needs to focus on the action not the open. The effect and influence of the subject line goes beyond just the open metric.

Subject Line	Opened	Clicked	Converted
Win the pampering prize of a lifetime worth $10,000	38.19%	9.35%	6.74%
Win spa breaks, a personal shopper and more worth $10,000	35.76%	11.03%	9.19%
Win a pampered new you worth $10,000	38.01%	15.45%	10.67%
Win a trip to Champneys and more worth $10,000 with Veet	33.23%	16.76%	11.01%

Don't forget about your automated processes! These are fantastic opportunities to be generating revenue, so don't just leave it at the first subject line you think of – be sure to test them – I can guarantee it will be worth your while.

Below is a test that was performed on a shopping cart abandonment email. The objective is to drive the abandoners back to their cart to purchase and each subject line was sent to 50% of the audience.

Version A: Reminder: Items Saved in Your Shopping Cart – Shop Now for an Extra 10%

Version B: Come Back and Save an Extra 10%

Results? Version A increased total orders by 21% and revenue by 35%… even though its open rate was 10.5% lower than Version B!

Here's another subject line test that shows the importance of measuring the correct metric:

☑ Version A: Your Opinion Counts – Win a Fiji Hand Tote
☑ Version B: Take the 5 Minute Fiji Survey – Win $50.

So although Version B got fewer opens it gained higher click-through's and as such was designated as the winner, as the objective for this email was for the survey to be taken.

> Length or specificity?

This is a question I can guarantee will always arise when the subject of subject lines is being

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discussed. "Should the subject line length be short or long?" In fact there have been many studies and reports based on this very question. I believe this is the wrong question to be asking. Instead we should be asking "Should the subject line be specific or generic?". And the answer to this will depend upon your objective and metric of success.

Generally speaking a generic subject line tends to be short and as most email marketers measure open rates as the metric of success, this is why many experts will provide the advice of 'keep your subject lines short'. It's not the length that is causing them to open, it's the fact that it is generic and as such is appealing to a wide audience.

However, generally speaking, by their nature, more specific subject lines tend to be longer in length. These specific subject lines will often gain lower opens, because they filter out those who are not interested in the topic or offer that is being promoted in the subject line. However, because of this targeting, the click-through's are often higher – because the subject line has attracted the audience that is most likely to convert for this particular offer.

As stated previously, whether you use a generic or a specific subject line will depend upon your objective. Let's look at a couple of examples:

The below test from Whichtestwon.com was performed on Browse Abandonment emails. The consumer had browsed a product but not added them to the basket. The objective of this email is to convert to buy.

Test:

Version A: Still looking for tickets to {Search Location}}?
Version B: Haven't found what you are looking for?
Results:
Version A, the abandonment subject line with the location merge field, increased opens by 31% and bookings by 38% at a 99% confidence level.

The below test is to a list of cold leads, and whilst they didn't specify the objective on whichtestwon.com, the objective may have been to simply spark interest – and not gain conversions. In which case, an ambiguous subject line designed to appeal to a wide audience and base the success metric on the opens.

Test:

Version A: Only 12 Models Left - $572/Month
Version B: An easy decision
Results:
Version B, the ambiguous subject line, increased opens by 112% at a 95% confidence rate.

Summary

This guide has focused on the key ingredients of crafting an effective subject line and as you can see, many elements and different tactics can be applied to a simple subject line. Hopefully this guide reinforces the importance of dedicating time to crafting your subject line before you start on your email.

It might take a while to get a subject line that combines the right combination of approaches or it might be that a number of approaches work well for you and different segments of your audience.

And finally, the importance of testing and monitoring the impact shouldn't be underestimated – it will often be a slow burn and tiny tweaks will provide you with both an immediate uplift and valuable insights to your audience.

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