

3 ways for startups to master the art of emailing

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Chances are, your business needs something: more clients, members, customers, partners or publicity.: Whether you have an in-house team or hire a marketing company, you'll want to create original, high-value content for those inevitable email campaigns.

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After launching our own company, we used the vast amount of data that powers our car search-engine to create interesting and useful studies, like the " 10 Longest-Lasting Cars" and " New Cars Owners Get Rid of the Fastest." We hired two PR firms to help us get media coverage, but the effort ended up being an expensive mistake when both studies flopped. Reporters didn't bite.

That's when we decided to try emailing reporters ourselves. Through trial and error, we started having some successes that we were been able to build on. Today, our research has been featured in more than 1, 200 stories by major news outlets, including ABC News, CNBC, *Consumer Reports* , *USA Today* , *Forbes* , the *Wall Street Journal* , the *Washington Post* and Reuters.

Here are the three main things I've learned that can help your startup get great results, no matter whom you're emailing.

1. Be a real person.

As a CEO or founder, you may recognize that copy writing is not your thing. That's okay. It might be even better than okay, because your emails will sound like they're from a real person versus a cheesy sales robot -- even

though that bot likely understands personas, segmentation, automation and all the email marketing stuff you're supposed to do.

If in doubt, use this quick checklist for ideas.

- Let your personality show. It will make your message more engaging for readers -- unless that message is self-centered, long-winded or confusing. Your emails should be clear, concise and focused on your audience's needs.
- Avoid unnecessary hype, jargon, clichés and euphemisms. (Hopefully, this is a no-brainer.)
- Get personal. Simply put, there should be more "you" than "I" and "we" in your text. Find natural opportunities to customize your email with names (theirs and yours), specific info about your prospects and anything else that's appropriate.
- Respect people's time. Make sure that what you're sending provides actual value, and do enough research that you can answer why it's both relevant and useful to them.

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2. Think small.

Some companies treat email like a dating app and take the "swipe right on everyone" approach, thinking that more outgoing emails will equal better results. Maybe that's true occasionally, but do you want to risk losing half your subscribers and annoying future prospects with content they don't care about?

Even though we've compiled a big media list, we spend most of our time researching the right journalists to pitch to for each new study we publish. We don't automatically email everyone in our database just because we have their contact info or we've emailed them before.

Instead, the story has to be a relevant and potentially valuable resource for the reporter(s) targeted. Creating small, targeted email lists has helped increase our open and response rates, as well as build relationships and credibility with our audience.

The same idea applies to word count and calls-to-action. Especially with cold emails, keeping the length short ups the odds that your message will be read and responded to. Think *busy people with short attention ps*, which is also a good reason to limit CTAs to one per email. You might even get a 1,617 percent increase in sales as did when it tested using one versus four different CTAs.

3. Track and analyze your data.

It's easy to look at email stats and make a few adjustments to your next campaign. But, what about comparing multiple campaigns or targeting high-priority individuals over time?

One of the ways we keep improving results for similar content and smaller, repeatedly used lists is to manually track key data. If you don't use email software or you're a fellow data nerd, you may already do this. If not, then consider creating a simple Excel spreadsheet or another format for record keeping. These are some examples of what's in our media spreadsheet:

- Contact info, title, interests, preferences, bio and social media links
- Subject lines and CTAs used
- Time/day of initial and follow-up emails
- Time/day of open and subsequent opens
- Time/day of replies, with full text copy and pasted, and any internal notes
- Stats on opens, replies and conversions (overall and per segment)

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Decide what info is most useful to you and how much detail to include.

Having your data in one place will save you time by making it easier to collaborate, analyze behavior and ensure appropriate follow-ups. Ideally, you'll begin to notice patterns and gaps beyond the typically reported stats, and you can continuously optimize your email strategy.