

EMAIL SUBJECT LINES

PART ONE: Getting the Click

I recently reviewed over 300 emails I received from non-profits.

Which ones did I open immediately? Which ones remained unopened?

The answer confirmed what many of us know:

1. Shorter is better.
2. Questions work well.
3. The "three dots" device is still effective (ellipsis at the end) but now common.

What didn't work so well?

1. Salesy, hypey (no surprise there).
2. Subject lines with one or more words in ALL CAPS.
3. Most subject lines with an exclamation point at end.
4. Long subject lines (eyes glaze over).
5. Boring subject lines (no reason to open; easy to delete).
6. Lines everyone seems to be using (be unique!).

In fairness, many of the emails were regular updates, informational, reports, and the like. I focused on the ones going for click through and action.

The subject lines I found most effective, in no particular order, with my notes following the line, are below.

James, poverty has a surprising solution ... [what is it?!]

a personal confession [what? this sounds juicy!]

Important Things to Know [I want to know -- what?]

These Videos Say It All [what videos -- what do they say?]

A free resource for you [direct benefit ... free; but be aware of spam-filter issue]

How can we serve you better? [I get input, they care]

Our Free Gift to You [what gift ... free!]

Does Romans 10:14 apply to you?

[What does it say ... easier to click than look up in my bible]

An important person I want you to meet [Who ... how important?]

We loved it! [Loved what?]

You Gave to Linh. Now She's Giving to Others.

[Who's Linh? What did she get? What is she giving?]

Important update [Sounds important ... but don't overuse this line.]

You're now part of something big [I am? What?]

Help give Arianna a safe new home

[Who's Arianna ... why does she need a new home?]

Did you know? [Know what?]

Takeaways:

Notice how many of these lines sparked curiosity.

Also, the effectiveness of using a specific person's name.

And how referencing a scripture verse worked.

Ellipses are becoming a bit overused, but generally I found them still effective.

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PART TWO: Going from “Delete!” to “Click!”

I recently reviewed over 300 emails I received from non-profits.

I am receiving these emails as a *prospective donor*, having opted-in on each non-profit’s website for updates, news, and e-letters.

In a previous article, I showed examples of effective subject lines, and also discussed characteristics of subject lines that didn’t work so well.

This article shows examples of less-effective subject lines – and how those subject lines could have been improved, based on the content of the email.

Again, I focused on the emails going for click through and action (not regular updates and reports).

Below are 10 examples of emails with subject lines ranging from “pretty good” to “delete now” – and how each of them could have been written to get my click.

The actual subject line is in bold.

My revised version is immediately below the actual subject line.

Here we go:

How you can help us before June 1!

Why is Today the Day?

[Note: this non-profit was pushing for donations prior to the end of its fiscal year, 5/31; it has a 4-star Charity Navigator rating, but failed to mention that credibility-boosting fact. Please remind me of your stellar stewardship!]

Breaking: 5x match opportunity for you, James

Boost your impact 500% ... if you act now.

5 Adorable Babies Born in Quarantine

How adorable are these 5 “quarantine babies?”

[Note: this appeal for donations had great images, but no clear donation button. Please make it obvious what you want me to do next.]

James, Aliou spent years suffering from third-degree burns ...

No one noticed 3-year old Aliou alone by the fire ...

These 8 People Prove You Can’t Quarantine Kindness

Can kindness really be quarantined?

You Could Be a Champion!

Are you Championship Material?

James, change is possible! Find out how.

Can you heal this mother’s broken heart?

[Note: the email had a link to a powerful video story about a mother’s anguish that her daughter would end up in poverty like her – and blame her.]

How can you serve God’s Kingdom?

What is Your Gift from God?

[Note: the email talks about each of us using his or her gift from God to help others.]

Together, we’re making an impact.

A 34 to 1 ROI? Here’s how ...

[Note: the email has some incredible facts about how \$1 yields \$34 in economic returns for the recipients, yet the subject line is generic.]

Standing together!

Dr. Zakariah is building a miracle hospital. He needs your help.

[Note: the email has a link to an incredibly compelling video; yet the subject line tells me nothing.]

Takeaways:

If you have a compelling story, make a specific reference to its content.

Spark curiosity if possible.

Avoid boiler-plate, generic, meaningless subject lines. How many of us got 200 emails during the shut-downs saying "We're Here for You"? Ugh.

Questions, correctly composed, are almost irresistible. We want to know the answer.

More than a few of the emails addressed me as "Dear Friend,". Don't do this. One addressed me by my last name: "Dear Wallace,". Don't do that. Address the recipient by his or her first name (use list-management software that populates that field). Otherwise, leave it off.

You always want to be talking to one person, the recipient. He or she must be made to feel uniquely important.

Make the recipient/prospective donor the would-be hero. You *need* him or her to make this *specific impact* on this *specific person* (or another person similarly situated). He or she can make a difference and change a real life!

Make *your* subject lines irresistibly clickable!