



Crafting a Must-Read Email Subject Line

By Ross Kramer , CEO of Listrak • Listrak, LLC • January 30, 2007

You wouldn't let a high-budget ad campaign hit the press without a compelling headline. But many marketers overlook the importance of their email subject line. In a similar manner, your subject line determines whether your subscriber opens your email, deletes it, or even mistakenly reports it as spam.

As email marketing success soars, and as more marketers take advantage of this valuable communication channel, daily message volume continues to rise. While the volume of email increases, more recipients are using the subject lines of the emails they receive as their gatekeeper. This means that smart marketers must take full advantage of clever copywriting techniques to boost response.

Listrak, an integrated, self-service email campaign management solution, has served trusted clients for many years across all industries including for-profit, non-profit, educational, and municipal facilities. With this useful backstage access into what works and what doesn't, we have devised best practice strategies that can help any marketer stay on top.

How to Push your Email Campaigns from Received to Read Status

As a marketer, you invest hours of time into every email campaign. The message you convey is extremely important to you – and to your company. Yet, when your campaign is finally launched, the only piece your subscribers may see is an instantaneous new email message waiting in their inboxes. This email arrives amid a myriad of other messages from their bosses, co-workers, friends, family members, and other organizations. It's also possible that your important email campaign will appear alongside several spam messages. At this moment, your subscriber has to decide whether or not they want to open your company's email or delete it based on several factors; including the quantity of email they've received, the importance of other competing messages, and

their own personal or professional time constraints. The entire process involved in determining whether or not to keep a message takes, on average, only about a half second. But an effective subject line can push your message from received to opened status just as quickly.

Based on years of experience and observation, we've identified key elements in subject lines that can improve email marketing campaign success regardless of your industry or niche. Let's look at a few best practice techniques.

Communicate Your Purpose: Your subject line should clearly and effectively convey the content and purpose of your message. This gives your subscriber immediate insight into its intrinsic value. When explaining your purpose, show your subscriber how he or she can benefit from reading your email. For example, expand the generic "OurSite Newsletter Issue No. 1" headline to "OurSite Newsletter: 10 Tips To Financial Freedom".

Keep It Short: Once you realize the importance of your subject line, it's easy to get overzealous and cram in as much information as you can. But, studies indicate that shorter subject lines are better. The ideal length is six words or less. To shorten your subject line, try to integrate colons and other punctuation to separate your thoughts. For example, replace "Listrak announces availability of Coffee and a Demo promotion through February 28" with a much tighter "Listrak: Coffee and Demo Promo (through 2/28)".

Incorporate Your Company Name: When you include your company name in your subject line, you promote and reinforce your brand, increase credibility, and let your subscribers know that your email is from a trustworthy source. Plus, name recognition can safeguard your message from unnecessary spam reports from recipients at web-based email providers such as AOL and Hotmail who can't view previews of email messages, but can report your company based solely on the subject line.

Adding your company name to your subject line increases unique open rates by an average of five percent.

Use Popular Keywords: Integrate popular keywords in your subject lines to validate your message. Also, stay away from overused, spam-triggering words like free, guaranteed, or approved. You should also avoid using unnecessary marks like exclamation points. Excessive and unnecessary symbols don't improve response, but instead diminish it.

Be Honest: Develop a subject line that truthfully reflects your email body content. You can stay in complete compliance with the federal CAN-SPAM Act by avoiding subject lines with "RE:" or "FW:".

Personalization: When you personalize the subject line with the recipient's name, you measurably increase open rate.

Include an Offer: Like any other ad campaign, email marketing success soars when you provide a discount or offer in the subject line. If you set a time limit or expiration, your response grows even more.

Test Client Compatibility: Before you send your email campaign, test design compatibility across various email clients – from AOL to Hotmail and Outlook. What might look perfect on one application can have a completely different look on another.

Now, integrate all of these best practice suggestions into one powerful subject line: "Roland, last chance to save 20% on Dell laptops".

The Importance of Subject Line Testing

While these strategies are a great start, each company, industry, and list is unique. Once you've developed one or two

strong subject lines using our best practice guidelines, test your headlines for even greater response. When you increase clicks even one percent, depending on your list size, you can add substantial revenue to your bottom line.

A/B subject line split testing is one of the smartest and easiest techniques marketers can use to accelerate response. Because email marketing is instantaneous, unlike traditional postal mail, you gain the added advantage of receiving statistically valid results within just a few hours.

To split test your campaign, extract 20 percent of your list as a test group. Then split this sub-group into two: Group A and Group B. Send a test campaign using two unique subject lines to each group. Then, within just three hours, you should have enough data compiled to analyze results and determine which headline reaped the greatest response. While this practice works best with large lists of more than 1,000 recipients, you should still acquire worthwhile feedback with smaller lists. When marketers test and tune their email subject lines, they improve response 41.4 percent on average. Listrak provides powerful, real-time analytic reports and data mining tools to make testing easy and automated. Reports are immediately available, so you can change your subject line, body content, layout or design on the fly. Listrak members also see exactly who opened and read their promotion – and which links they clicked within the body copy. The extra time you devote to testing and fine-tuning can help you increase reader satisfaction and loyalty.

Conclusion

Email marketing subject lines are arguably the most important part of your entire campaign. Why? If your email was not opened or read, your efforts were wasted, your message was not heard, and your products were not sold. Recipients filter their inboxes faster than ever before, deciding whether to delete or read an email just a half second after reading the subject line. But Listrak has identified key criteria that can help

you move email marketing message to the next level. Once you've developed creative subject lines based on our best practice guidelines, A/B testing can improve your response by 41.4 percent on average. To make this testing process as fast and easy as possible Listrak offers its subscribers comprehensive analytic reports showing which emails were opened, who opened them and which internal links they clicked.

About Listrak

Listrak is a leading provider of hosted email marketing software, allowing permission-based marketers to manage, send, track and grow their email marketing investment. We deliver email marketing intelligence through our intuitive web-based application. Leading marketers have come to rely on this intelligence to better manage email in their multi-channel marketing mix.

Listrak software helps companies, agencies and associations better manage customer relations in their marketing campaigns. Its web-enabled interface helps marketers engage their customers using an advanced profiling and personalization engine. Listrak's world-class support and professional services assist clients with enterprise integration. Its clients include L'Oreal, Motorola, Jeep, Pearle Vision, PR Newswire, The Islands of the Bahamas and the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

To learn more about the many ways Listrak can strengthen your email marketing campaigns, or to sign up for a 20-minute web-based tour, visit www.listrak.com.