

7 Tips for Subject Lines That Increase Open Rates

Subject lines, along with the “From” address, have a tremendous impact on the open rate of your emails and can strongly influence other response metrics. If the subscriber doesn’t use a preview pane, it is the only piece of information he or she must use to determine if the email is worth opening.

So, you need to add some zing to your subject lines. Be unique and enticing. Remember, thousands of email marketing managers are fighting for attention in that inbox. Don’t settle for generic, bland subject lines. You are competing with every other email in the inbox, and you want to win. Put thought and attention into every subject line. Don’t try to write it two minutes before the email goes out the door. Most importantly, resist the pressure to go for the safe choice or standard marketing line. If you zig when others zag, your message will stand out from the pack.

Use these 7 ideas to make your next subject line a winner ...

- 1 Keep it as short as possible:** Many email clients (especially web-based readers) cut off long subject lines. The number of allowed characters varies and changes. We recommend no more than 55 characters, and Return Path analysis shows that open rates often drop after 40 characters. Pay particular attention to the first 30 characters since they are the most visible in an inbox.
- 2 Always be testing:** Test multiple approaches as often as you can. One of the great benefits of email is that you can test several subject lines on a small sample of recipients. A day later, you can then send your entire campaign with the subject line that gained the best results.
- 3 Skip spam words:** Spammers have stolen many great direct response words and phrases, such as “free,” “discount,” “save,” “buy now,” and “special offer.” As a result, spam filters may block your email if it contains these words. To test subject lines, send your email to test recipients with spam-checker software.
- 4 Never use all capital letters:** In addition to being a classic spam technique that most filters will catch, all capital letters looks unprofessional. Users will more often than not delete them immediately. On a related note, don’t deceptively use “RE:” or “FW:” in your subject lines to make it seem as if you are replying to the user. This is another classic and unprofessional spammer technique.
- 5 Be relevant:** Make sure the line is enticing and accurately reflects the relevant content your email contains. After all, that’s why the subscriber wants your email. If that’s not enough of a reason, consider that CAN-SPAM—the federal legislation governing email communication—requires that your subject line at least not be deceptive.
- 6 Show value:** The subject line should state the value proposition, that is, what the reader will get from reading the message.
- 7 Put a number in the subject line:** What works for magazine covers also works for email. Readers respond to numbers. In particular, “top” lists are highly effective. We like “Top 10,” but other numbers also work well in this format.

Want More Ideas?

Speak with Return Path’s Strategic Services team of email response experts. Contact your account manager for an introduction or email rc@returnpath.net