

Writing Good Email Subject Lines

If you do an advanced Google search on writing good email subject lines – you'll find 12,200 results. So it's fair to say that a lot of people have a lot to say about what constitutes a good Subject Line. This is because Subject Lines rank amongst the top ways to ensure your email is opened.

But what exactly does a good Subject Line look like? Is it short, or long? Does it include company branding? Is it personalized for the recipient? Does it use words like 'free' and 'hurry'?

There are very few hard and fast rules* when it comes to Subject Lines as each business has different objectives and audiences. However there are a number of good practices that you can use to ensure your subject line is effective.

So let's take a quick glance at a handful of Subject Lines to see why they work.

EXAMPLE 1

Subject:

Happy Birthday Melina

This is an email from a retailer sent to Melina for her birthday.

Why it works:

- It's timely and relevant as it was sent on Melina's birthday.
- The use of a first name fits in well with this type of message. 'Happy birthday' is a personal message so it makes sense here to personalise the message with Melina's name.

What could be improved:

- Melina is likely to receive a number of messages just like this one on her birthday so there is nothing to distinguish this type of message from the other birthday messages she receives.
- It could be improved by including mention of an incentive accompanying the email.

Alternative

Happy birthday Melina & enjoy our gift to you.

EXAMPLE 2

Subject:

DKNY Jewels, Condura Bags & Anon Sunglasses – Exclusive Sale Started

This is a member based email announcing a sales event from an online shopping website.

Why it works:

- Including the word 'exclusive' reinforces the benefit of being a member and makes the recipient feel special for being included.
- The sender of this email is capitalizing on the brand recognition of its suppliers by including their brand names in the subject line.

What I think could be improved:

An extra sense of urgency could be created by including an end date on the sale.

Alternative

DKNY Jewels, Condura Bags & Anon Sunglasses – Exclusive Sale Ends Friday.

EXAMPLE 3

Subject:

A dance debut, giveaways and a special breakfast event

This is a regular email newsletter from a performing arts centre.

Why it works:

- It's a short and succinct summary of the content within the email.
- Even at a quick glance the recipient knows what the email is about.
- Although it has no branding, it's ok in this instance as the 'From Name' clearly identifies the company that has sent the email.

What I think could be improved:

The message isn't personalised to my interests. I've provided this company with my personal interests via a preference centre on their website and I'm not interested in Dance as an event. Although this email does offer incentives in a 'giveaway' and 'special breakfast', I've lost interest immediately as I'm not interested in anything to do with dancing.

Alternative

Great new giveaways and a special breakfast event.

As with the above examples, there are many reasons why a Subject Line can work and how it can be improved. Take a look at your own Subject Lines and see if tweaks can be made to improve their performance. You may be surprised to find changing just one word in your Subject Line can have an impact on your bottom line results.

** One hard and fast rule: generally anything that works towards getting your email opened is good. However, your Subject Line should not be misleading in nature just to entice someone to open your email. Tricking someone to open your email will quickly lead your audience to feel cheated and may prompt an unsubscribe.*

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