

# CALL-TO-ACTION EMAILS

## *Best Practices*

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### 1. Include digits in the subject line.

Numbers written as numerals (i.e. 7 as opposed to seven) stop wandering eyes of online readers, making it more likely that your email will get noticed in a crowded inbox.<sup>1</sup> This rule clashes with our NHCC Communications Manual on numbers 1-9 (which should be written out as one, two, etc.), but you can break this rule in personal communications.

### 2. Speaking of numbers, three is a win.

Numerous studies<sup>2</sup> have proven that the brain likes to be presented with three choices, anything higher can lead to skepticism or confusion. Try breaking your email into three (short) paragraphs, offer three options for meeting times, or describe your ministry/service opportunity using three adjectives.

### 3. Use the recipient's name more than once.

People love hearing their own name. The folks at Copyblogger cited some research<sup>3</sup> on brain activation when they said, "Few things light us up quite like seeing our own names in print or on the screen. Our names are intrinsically tied to our self-perception and make up a massive part of our identity. No surprise then, that we become more engaged and even more trusting of a message in which our name appears."

Try catching their eye by placing their name in the subject line and near the end when possible.

#### **EXAMPLE**

Subject line: *Jeff, here's the \_\_\_\_\_ info you requested*

Closing: *Thanks for your time, Jeff!*

#### 4. Write a relevant subject line.

Think of the subject line like the headline of a newspaper. What are you ultimately trying to say? Boil that down to 5-7 words. Make sure those words speak to the interests of your recipient and clearly communicate what you'd like from that email exchange. The more specific you can make it, the better.

##### **EXAMPLE**

Rather than: *Itinerary*

Try: *Itinerary for Seniors Summer Retreat*

#### 5. Only email one person at a time.

If at all possible, never send an email to multiple recipients at one time. It'll take a few extra minutes to email everyone individually, but you'll receive more and better responses.

Why? People push responsibility off of their own shoulders and onto the group whenever possible. If you send a message to five people, each person will assume that the other four will do whatever tasks are outlined in the message. The result, of course, is that nothing gets done.

If you have to message a group of people all at once, then do your best to assign tasks to specific people in the message.

#### 6. Give a specific call-to-action.

People are more responsive and willing to help if they've been given clear directions on how to contribute. Research from Carnegie Mellon found that people are more likely to respond to email requests that are easy to answer,<sup>4</sup> as opposed to complex messages that require more time and mental energy to address.

Ending your emails with open ended statements — i.e. “Let me know what works best for you” or “how is your schedule this week?” — does more harm than good. Rather than taking the time and energy to make the decision for both of you, they instead opt for “no decision” and you get no reply to your email.

## 7. Provide a deadline.

Lack of urgency is another reason for delayed responses. When it comes to email, this means that you need to state a clear deadline or risk waiting for a response until the recipient has “free time” – a rare commodity. To avoid this, provide the specific date and time by which you need a response.

Providing a deadline makes your expectations clear, so the reader is less likely to procrastinate. Do not give an artificial or bogus deadline. If the other person discovers that the deadline was not real, your credibility will be damaged. He/she will never take your deadlines seriously again.

## 8. Promise to follow up by phone if they don't respond.

Let them know that you understand they are busy, and that if you don't hear from them, you'll follow up with a call in a day or two.

This will increase your response rate. Some will respond with the equivalent of "I'm not interested" and that's okay! On the other hand, there will be others who don't respond and you can feel comfortable calling them now that you've set that expectation.

## 9. Provide a reason.

A study performed by Harvard social psychologist Ellen Langer found that people were more willing to comply with a request (in this instance, cut in line) when people used the word “because.” Even when the reason was seemingly nonsensical (i.e. “Can I use the copy machine first *because* I need to make a copy?”), nearly all (93%) people complied. When you ask someone to do you a favor, you'll be more successful if you provide a reason.

### **EXAMPLE**

*Let me know if you'll be at the meeting because I'm organizing teams to work together.*

## 10. Keep it short and simple.

Try to keep your email short, sweet, and to the point. People love to procrastinate. And anytime a long email hits our inbox, that's another excuse to procrastinate.

It's hard to send a fast response to a long email because it requires time to read, digest and respond. Plus, long emails typically include multiple questions or topics, which can

make it tough for the reader to determine what is important within the message (leading to more procrastination).

On the flip side, it's easy to send a short reply to a short email. It doesn't matter what you're talking about, a shorter email will always receive a faster response. If you want faster responses, then make it easy on the reader to respond. Ask one question, talk about one topic, and keep it short.

Be considerate of your audience and use spacing, numbers, bulleted lists etc., to visually break up your message so that it's easy to digest and take action on.

## 11. Don't use email at all.

Email isn't right for every need or for every person. Sometimes you're better off calling first. Or texting. Or utilizing social media. If you're using the applicable tips above and still struggling to get a reasonable number of responses, consider your alternatives. Communications is never one-size-fits-all.

## Resources

1. <http://www.nngroup.com/articles/web-writing-show-numbers-as-numerals/>
  2. <http://www.businessinsider.com/using-the-power-of-three-to-your-marketing-advantage-2013-5>
  3. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1647299/>
  4. <https://www.cs.cmu.edu/afs/cs.cmu.edu/Web/People/kiesler/publications/2005pdfs/2005-Dabbish-CHI.pdf>
- <http://www.inc.com/geoffrey-james/how-to-write-a-killer-sales-email.html>  
<http://michaelhyatt.com/faster-responses-to-your-email.html>  
<http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/5-ways-to-get-faster-email-responses.html>  
<http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/write-cold-email-get-response>  
<http://www.yesware.com/blog/emails-that-get-replies/>  
<http://www.buzzfeed.com/jessicamisener/how-to-write-emails-that-will-actually-get-a-response#.kdXz5emvW>  
<https://www.cpsa.com/articles/how-to-write-emails-that-get-a-response>