

# 20 Best Subject Lines

2026 Edition

Nathan Littleton



**To:** Your prospects

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**Subject:** Open me :)

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# **nathan littleton**

**build credibility • win business**

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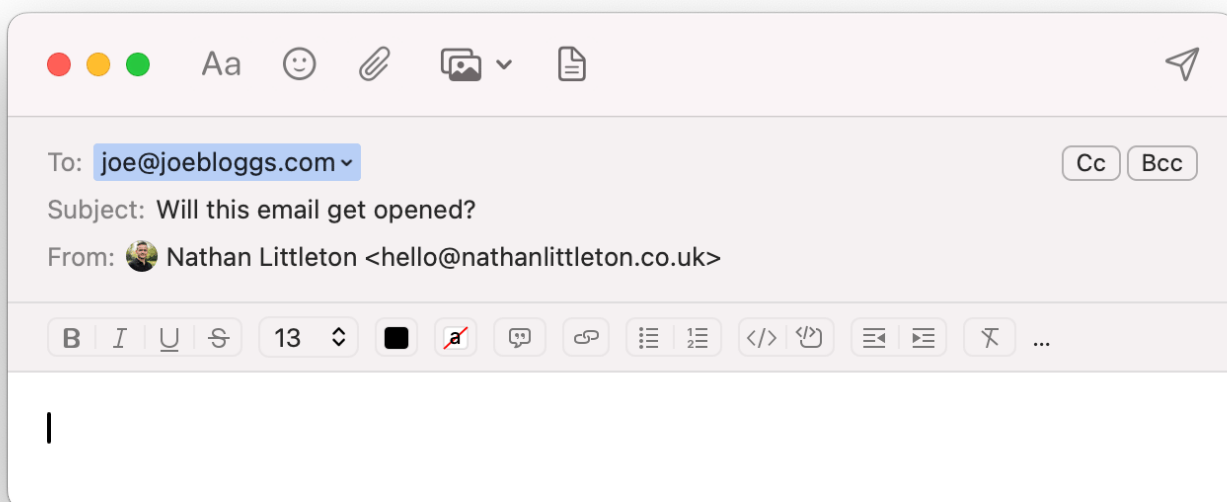
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# Contents

What is the subject line and why does it matter so much?	3
The 20 best subject lines	6
Bonus tips	27
About the author	30
How can I help you?	32
Want more like this?	33
Get the email marketing lowdown	34

# What is the subject line and why does it matter so much?

I presume you're here because you want to know how to improve the success of your email marketing campaigns; specifically, how to choose a great subject line that will encourage readers to open your email and read what you have to say. The subject line of an email is the part that's seen first, and along with the sender's name, is the most influential factor in determining whether your readers open your email or delete it. If you're going to be on the right side of that tussle, you need to choose a great subject line.



This book will show you the subject lines that have consistently given the best results in the thousands of email campaigns I've

sent for my own business and for clients all around the world, and in turn will give you great results too.

## Before we begin

- There are many factors that influence the open rates of your emails; subject lines are just one of them. If your subscriber list is old or cold (i.e. you haven't communicated with it in a long time), your open rates will be poor, even with the greatest will, or subject line, in the world.
- Your subject line serves one purpose: to buy an open. Nothing more. You can take care of the rest later.
- That said, it's still important to set the right expectations with your subject line. Don't mislead your readers. You can't promise a 50% discount in your subject line, as attractive as it is, if you're not going to deliver on it. And you can't use an intriguing subject line to get the open if there's no connection to the content of the email itself.
- Don't be the 'pushy salesperson'. If you have a database of people you communicate with regularly, you must appreciate their value and respect them accordingly. Provide people with

valuable, interesting content and interest in what you do will grow into sales.

- A great way to boost your open rates is to use a subject line which appears to be personal, as if it was written as a one-off, just for the person reading it.
- Finally, the only way you are able to measure how effective your email campaigns are is by using a dedicated service for doing so. Online services such as ActiveCampaign, ConvertKit, MailChimp and Campaign Monitor will provide you with a plethora of statistics relating to your users' behaviour. On the other hand, sending mass emails from your home or office computer using your regular email application can be disastrous, often leading to blacklisting.

# The 20 best subject lines

Here are the 20 subject lines you can use to boost the open rates of your email campaigns. If your email never gets opened, the content never gets read and the reader never does what you want them to do. Using one of these subject lines will give your open rates a lift.

They're not in a ranked order - I've used all of these subject lines several times for different campaigns and different audiences, so they've generated open rates that have varied but they have consistently been the highest performers.

Dive in and try one for yourself!

1.

# Thanks NAME

A little appreciation is a valuable thing when you're nurturing your subscriber lists. Whether you're thanking them for requesting a free download or simply for being a great customer, everybody likes to feel appreciated.

Use your email marketing app's 'merge tag' functionality to insert the recipient's name automatically.

—

## **Alternatives include:**

I really appreciate it, NAME

Thanks for this

Cheers

2.

# I'm not sure if this is for you?

Ambiguity is the key to why this subject line works so well. The fact we've led the recipient to believe it might not be for them in fact encourages them to think the opposite, or at least intrigues them enough to want to know what could possibly *not* be for them.

—

## **Alternatives include:**

Is this for you?

Did you see this?

I saw this and thought of you

3.

# As promised

This is suitable for any kind of follow-up, such as when you've met someone at a networking event, when you've committed to sending a lead magnet in exchange for an email address on a website, or when agreeing the next actions with a prospect.

—

**Alternatives include:**

I'm just emailing as promised

As discussed

Here it is

4.

## Not what I expected

This creates curiosity while suggesting you're about to share a genuine insight or surprise. It works because it implies you've tested something, experienced something, or learned something unexpected that you're now sharing. People are naturally drawn to content that challenges assumptions or reveals surprising results.

Use this when you have contrarian insights, surprising results from campaigns or tests, or lessons that challenged your assumptions. The key is delivering genuine surprise in the email content - if the revelation isn't actually unexpected, readers will feel misled.

—

### **Alternatives include:**

Unexpected results

This surprised me

Plot twist

5.

## Last chance

Making the topic of your email time-limited gives a sense of urgency. When coupled with a specific deadline and clear call-to-action in the body of your email, this subject line will fly.

—

### **Alternatives include:**

It's nearly over

Ends at 5pm

One place remaining

## 6.

# Please find attached

Generally speaking, attaching something of value to your email will increase the open rate (if it's a *real* attachment rather than a link, there's often a little paperclip icon next to the message). Even if it's a link rather than a real attachment, this subject line lets the reader know there's something in the email of value.

You might include a lead magnet you've promised, the details of a new product you're launching, or even something personalised that's just for them

—

### **Alternatives include:**

Attached

Confirmation enclosed

Invitation attached

# 7.

## Revealed

*"An idea, to be suggestive, must come to the individual with the force of revelation." - William James*

Apple are the Jedi warriors of revelation, and you can use it, too. Some of our best marketing campaigns have come on the back of a vague 'coming soon' message which finally gets revealed when the hype is at tipping point.

—

### **Alternatives include:**

It's here

The wait is over

I can't wait to show you this

8.

# Could you do me a favour?

This works best with either a very well-nurtured list, or with clients you have good relationships with. If you've provided great service to a client, they're more likely to respond to a request for a favour. You could use this one targeted at the clients you've worked with most recently, and ask the following: 'I was wondering if you know just one person who would benefit from *product* in the same way you have?' There's a good chance you'll get a reply with the details of a hot new prospect.

—

## **Alternatives include:**

Can you help?

I hate to ask, but...

Cheeky request

9.

## Quick question

This is the ultimate intrigue-based subject line to set your reader's mind wandering into what you might be asking. It relies on having a compelling opening to your email to bridge the gap between opening the message and being curious enough to answer your question.

—

### **Alternatives include:**

Can I ask you something?

I was just wondering

Question

# 10.

## Cancelled

On a number of occasions I've used this subject line, I've seen uplifts in open rates of as much as 15%. There are plenty of occasions you can use this one, and it's an excellent subject line to use when referring to a place on a programme or workshop opening up because a customer has cancelled their place for some reason.

—

### **Alternatives include:**

Finished

It's over

I can't do it

11.

# 8pm tonight

This is an example of a time-based subject line that gets great results. It's ambiguous and could be seen as urgent, so use it wisely. They can reference an event that's happening that you'd like to invite the reader to, or the launch of a product or piece of content.

—

## **Alternatives include:**

Tomorrow

Are you free for a chat today?

What are you doing tonight?

# 12.

## Something new

This has consistently been one of the highest-performing subject lines I've used recently. I've tended to use it with my email marketing clients when they are resurrecting a list they haven't sent regularly to for a while, to position a new format for the valuable educational emails we'll be working with them to send in the future. You could also use this to feature a new product or educational resource.

—

### **Alternatives include:**

Brand new

Launching today

It's finally here

# 13.

## I'm curious...

This opens a conversation rather than making a statement, creating a sense of collaboration and dialogue. It's humble and inviting rather than authoritative, which makes readers feel like partners rather than targets. The ellipsis adds intrigue about what you're curious about.

Use when genuinely seeking input, when introducing a question you'll explore in the email, or when you want to start a two-way conversation with your audience. Works brilliantly for surveys, feedback requests, or when testing new ideas with your most engaged subscribers.

—

### **Alternatives include:**

Wondering something

Can I ask you something?

Just curious

14.

# What happened?

Use this to resurrect a lead that has gone cold, or to return a website visitor to their abandoned cart or products they've shown interest in. It's an open question that also creates a worthwhile opportunity to start a conversation.

—

**Alternatives include:**

Is everything OK?

Do you need any help?

What's up?

15.

## A gift for you

Who doesn't love a gift?! Get on your subscribers' good side by giving out valuable resources, vouchers and even certain products for free.

—

### **Alternatives include:**

I have something for you

I saw this and thought of you

Just for you :)

16.

# I think there's a problem

It says a lot about human psychology, but one of the common factors of many of the subject lines I see that get the highest open rates is that they're really rather negative! More often than not, they perform much better than subject lines containing positive phrases. Of course, it's possible to spin a subject line such as this into a positive message.

—

## **Alternatives include:**

Something's wrong

Don't make the same mistake I did

Oops

17.

# I'm going to regret this

This creates intrigue by suggesting you're about to share something risky, controversial, or generous that goes against your better judgment. The tension between what you're doing and what you "should" do is compelling.

Use when offering an unusually good deal, sharing an unpopular opinion, revealing something you normally wouldn't, or being more transparent than competitors would dare. The content must justify the setup - don't use this for standard promotions or safe opinions.

—

## **Alternatives include:**

This might be a mistake

I probably shouldn't tell you this

Against my better judgment

18.

## Still interested?

This subject line works beautifully for re-engagement campaigns because it's direct without being pushy. It acknowledges that time has passed and gently checks in, making it perfect for abandoned carts, dormant leads, or prospects who've gone quiet. The brevity creates intrigue while the question mark softens what could otherwise feel like pressure.

Use this when following up with someone who showed initial interest but didn't convert, or when reaching out to subscribers who haven't engaged recently. It gives people an easy out while simultaneously reigniting their curiosity about what they might be missing.

—

### **Alternatives include:**

Still thinking about it?

Change of heart?

Should I follow up?

19.

# Did you see this?

Questions make powerful subject lines. The suggestion that your reader might have missed out on something valuable or interesting is powerful in itself. Combine the two and you've got the recipe for a subject line that's incredibly intriguing!

—

## **Alternatives include:**

Want to see something exciting?

Have you seen?

Did you miss this?

20.

# Can I be honest with you?

This subject line creates instant intimacy by suggesting you're about to share something genuine. It steps outside the usual marketer-customer dynamic and treats the reader like a trusted confidante. The question format invites permission, which psychologically makes people more receptive to what follows.

Use this when sharing a lesson from a mistake, addressing a challenge your audience faces, or being transparent about your business. The key is delivering on the promise - don't follow with a standard sales pitch or readers will feel manipulated.

—

## **Alternatives include:**

Let me be straight with you

I want to be upfront about something

Can we talk honestly?

# Bonus tips

Try the tips below to boost the open rates and click rates on your next campaign:

## Merge Tags

Include the name of your recipient, or another personal detail about them, using merge tags. Nearly all email marketing services have a merge tag feature, which allows you to include details specific to each person who receives it. This means you could send out 1000 emails, all personalised with the recipient's name. That's why it's important to include that information when you import your data, or include those fields in any data capture forms on your website.

## A/B Split Testing

This is by far the most effective tool for testing your subject lines on-the-fly. Most online email marketing services have the option of A/B split testing, which means you can send a small batch of emails in your campaign with two different subject lines (as well as a number of other varying elements), and the email will then be

sent to the rest of your list with the one that resulted in the best open rate.

## **Social Sharing**

Make the most of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn in your next campaign by connecting your social network accounts to the email marketing service you're using (you can usually do this from the email marketing app itself). By doing so, whenever you send out a new campaign, it'll automatically be tweeted to your Twitter followers and appear on the Facebook and LinkedIn news feeds of every person you're connected with.

## **Choosing the best day/time to send your emails**

The best time and day to send depends on your audience, not just anyone's audience, but yours only. Sure, there are ideas we can gather from other people with similar market bases, but there may be different circumstances that apply to your subscribers that won't apply to someone else's. In the same way that comparing your open rates to someone else's is pointless and you should only

try to improve on your last campaign, you also have to test and measure the correct time and day of the week for your list.

As a starting point, put yourself in the shoes of your reader. Think about what they're doing on a Monday morning, or a Wednesday evening, or a weekend afternoon. When are they most likely to read your email with their full attention?

# About the author

**Nathan Littleton is a marketer, professional speaker and author who specialises in helping businesses to grow by attracting and winning more customers.**



Each year he sends more than a million emails on behalf of his clients, and his proven track record has led to him working with leading brands including Microsoft, Virgin Care and the BBC.

Having started his first business, building websites from his bedroom at the age of just 12, he quickly built a reputation for his unique take on email marketing and growing businesses by sending truly un-deletable emails.

Since then, he has made it his mission to give businesses the insights and tools to take their marketing campaigns from good to

great, leveraging more than 20 years of experience in the marketing world.

As an in-demand conference speaker, Nathan speaks regularly on email marketing, content creation and marketing strategy with the perfect blend of energy, insight and actionable advice. He holds the distinction of being the youngest ever National President of the Professional Speaking Association and continues to be an active Fellow of the organisation.

Nathan has been honoured with the Professional Speaking Award of Excellence and inducted into the PSA's Hall of Fame, a distinction shared by around 30 speakers in the UK.

He is the author of two books: *'Delivered: The No-nonsense Guide to Successful Email Marketing'* and *'Opened: Great Subject Lines for Higher Email Open Rates.'*

When he's not speaking, writing or sending emails, Nathan is a long-suffering Aston Villa fan, stand-up comedy fanatic and proud geek.

# How can I help you?

I've worked with thousands of businesses around the world, helping them to get better results from their email marketing. I offer everything from strategy planning and coaching to a fully-managed email newsletter service.

Get in touch today to find out how I can help you:

**Web**                    [www.nathanlitleton.co.uk](http://www.nathanlitleton.co.uk)  
**Email**                [hello@nathanlitleton.co.uk](mailto:hello@nathanlitleton.co.uk)  
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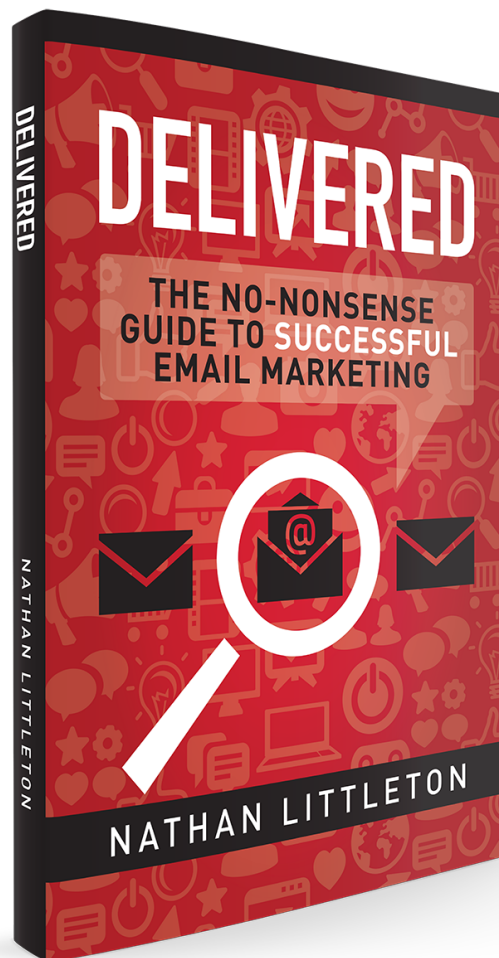
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