SalesLoft

33 Tips For Optimizing B2B Sales Emails

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE

Contents

Intro

When it comes to **B2B sales emails**, everything from your subject line to your signature can make a difference. But what do you do when everyone seems to have an opinion about what to say and when to say it? It can get overwhelming!

Luckily, we have the answer. We analyzed hundreds of **millions of interactions** to create recommendations based on real data. It's the only guide you'll ever need for understanding what works and what does not in multi-touch, multi-channel sales engagement.

In these pages, you'll find **33 immediately actionable tips** for email optimization. Uncover the answers to questions like:

How many touches should you have and over what timeframe?

What is the ideal number of words in a subject line?

Should you use bullets in emails?

What signoff will earn the most replies?

Cadence design

Be pleasantly persistent with multiple touches over multiple channels.

Pleasantly persistent
[plez-uhnt-lee per-sis-tuhnt, -zis-]

adjective

1. Making sure you follow up regularly, but not so often that you become a pest or a stalker.

2. Staying top-of-mind without wearing out your welcome.

TOPO's 2019 Sales Development Benchmark Report found that typical inbound cadences consist of **16.7** touches. Outbound cadences included even more, with an average of **21.3** touches. Those touches include phone, email, voicemail, and LinkedIn (InMail). There were also a few AI-driven touches in inbound cadences only.

In the same study, TOPO found **92%** of SDR teams leverage a triple-touch consisting of email, voicemail, and LinkedIn.

Separately, SalesLoft's Data Science team studied 200 million interactions and found single-channel cadence response rates are:

✉

77%
lower for email-only

📞

91%
lower for call-only

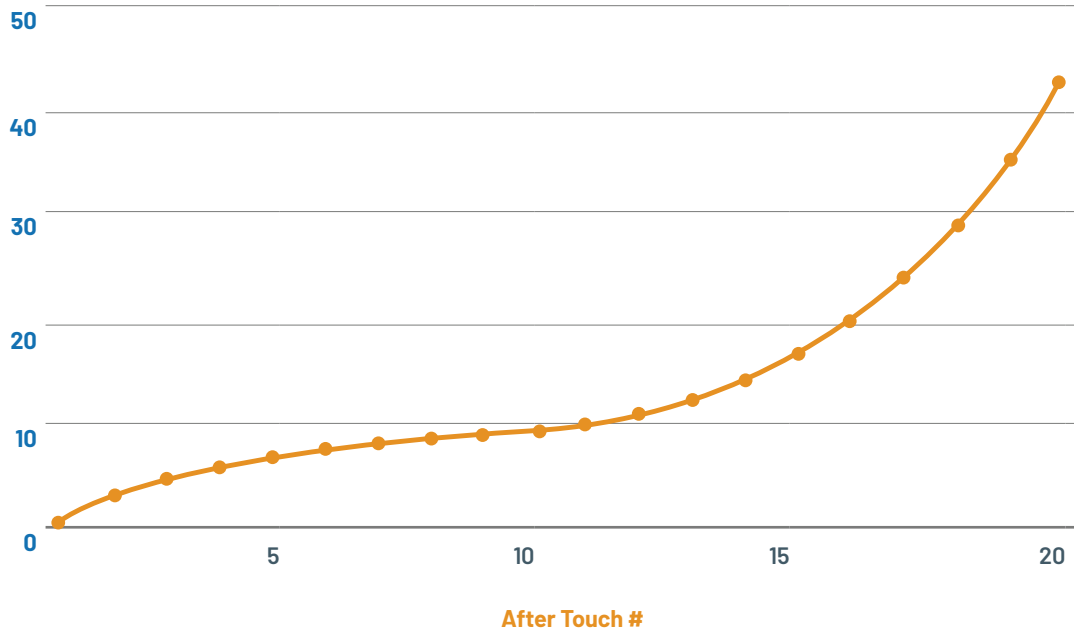To maximize your engagement rates, use a multi-touch, multi-channel cadence.

Source: TOPO 2019 Sales Development Benchmark Report

Allow "breathing room" between touches.

For the best results, execute a high number of touches in the first 10 business days, increasing the wait time between each touch gradually.
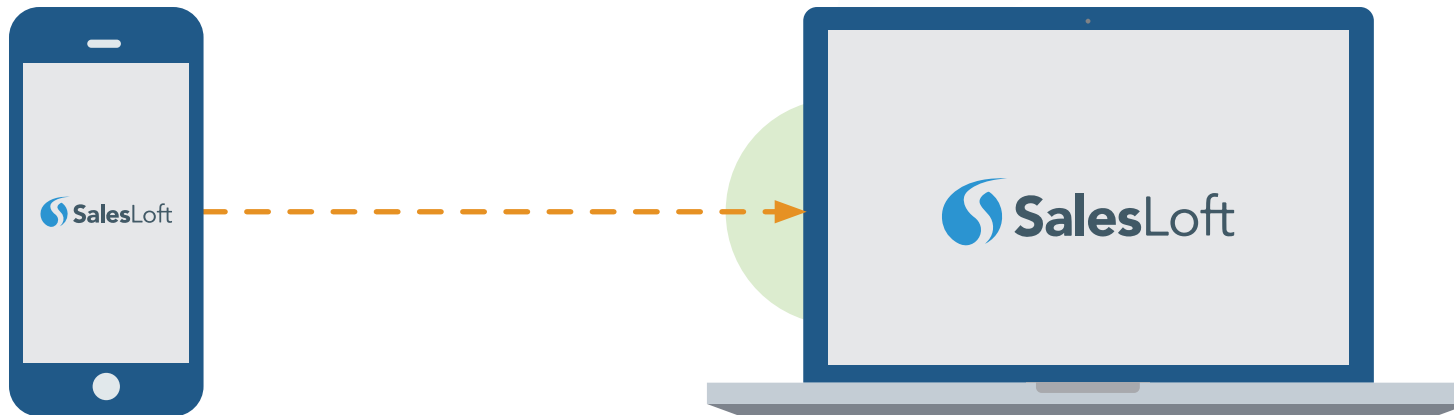
Then, keep nurturing once or twice per month.

Note: This is an average of best-performing cadences. Run your own A/B tests to find out if more or less aggressive cadences are best for you.

Do a double touch on Day 1, preferably with a call before email.

On Day 1, how you execute your first touch matters. **80%** of the top 100 cadences we looked at (out of a sample of 3.4 million) started with a call followed by an email.
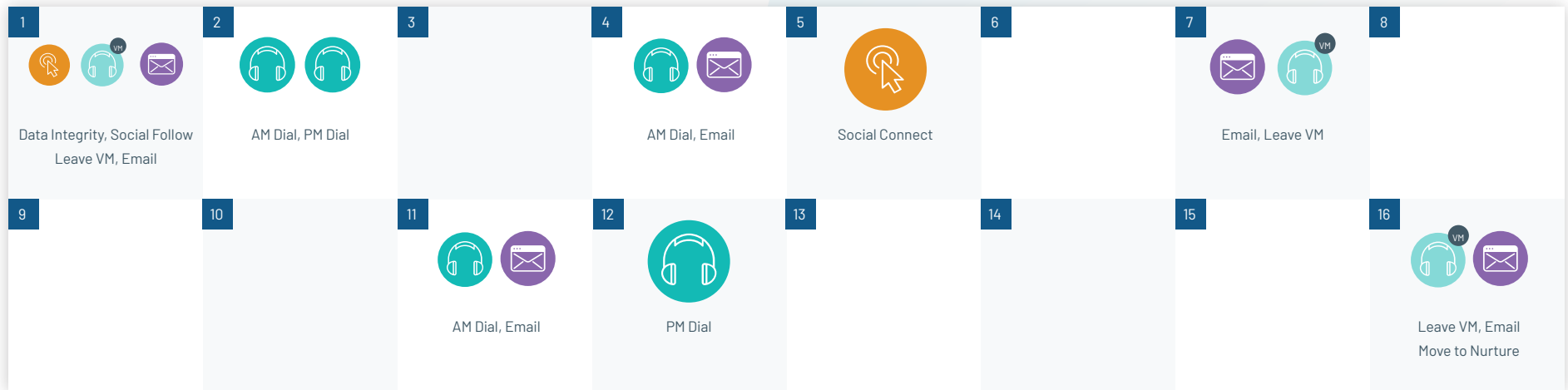
When you call first you can say, "Hey, I am going to send you an email about XYZ." Then you can direct them to reply via email rather than call you back. It's much more likely that they'll respond to the email than call you back.

Note: This is an average of best-performing cadences. Run your own A/B tests to find out if more or less aggressive cadences are best for you.

Practical Application

Given those best practices, here's a look what SalesLoft's own outbound cadence consists of.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Data Integrity, Social Follow Leave VM, Email	AM Dial, PM Dial		AM Dial, Email	Social Connect		Email, Leave VM	

9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
		AM Dial, Email	PM Dial				Leave VM, Email Move to Nurture

We're applying all of the tips you just read:

- Total of 15 touches
- Double touch on day 1 that is a call followed by email
- A pair of calls on day 2
- Allow a bit of breathing room between each interaction
- In the end, we have made 8 calls, sent 5 emails, and executed 2 social touches

If we don't get a response at the end of day 16, SalesLoft has an automation rule that will push that particular contact into the nurture cadence. It makes it easy to send them an email drip about once per month.

Engage rapidly and personally with inbound leads.

Just over half of companies are currently adhering to the best practice of following up with leads quickly. Only **58%** of Cloud 100 companies responded to "Demo Request" or "Contact Us" within an hour.
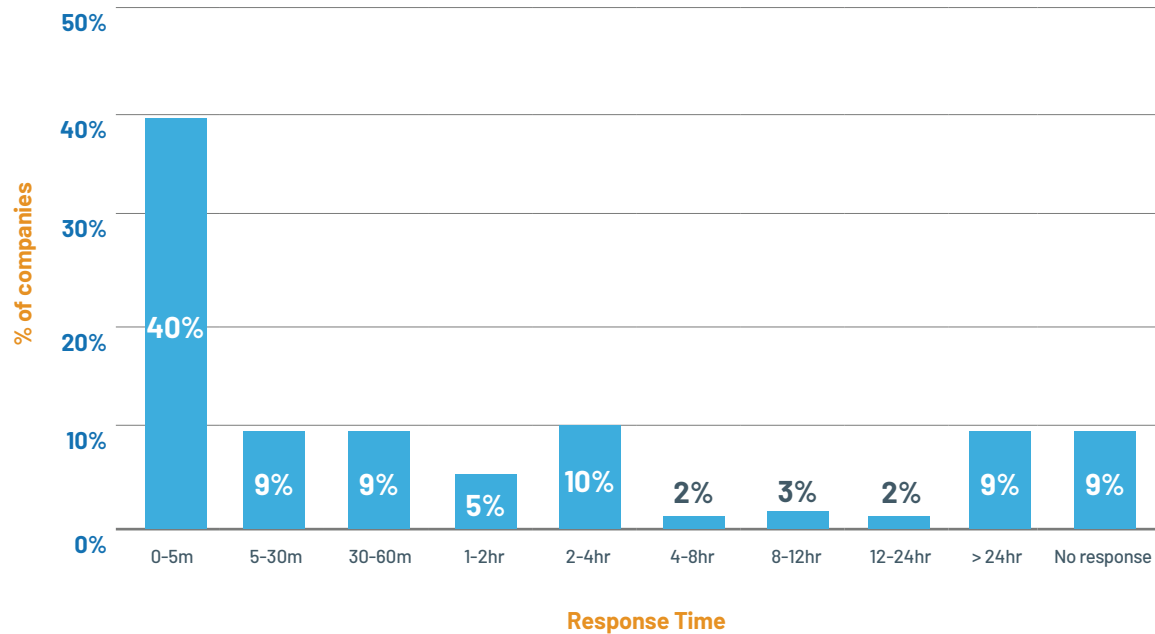

Quickly sending an automated initial email from a human ensures rapid, personal engagement. Spend the time to properly route and respond to inbound leads.

Here's an example of what an inbound response cadence looks like at SalesLoft.

Lead flow

The decision tree below shows what occurs when we receive an inbound lead. It is enriched and scored, then it is filtered into an inbound cadence. Pretty simple, right?
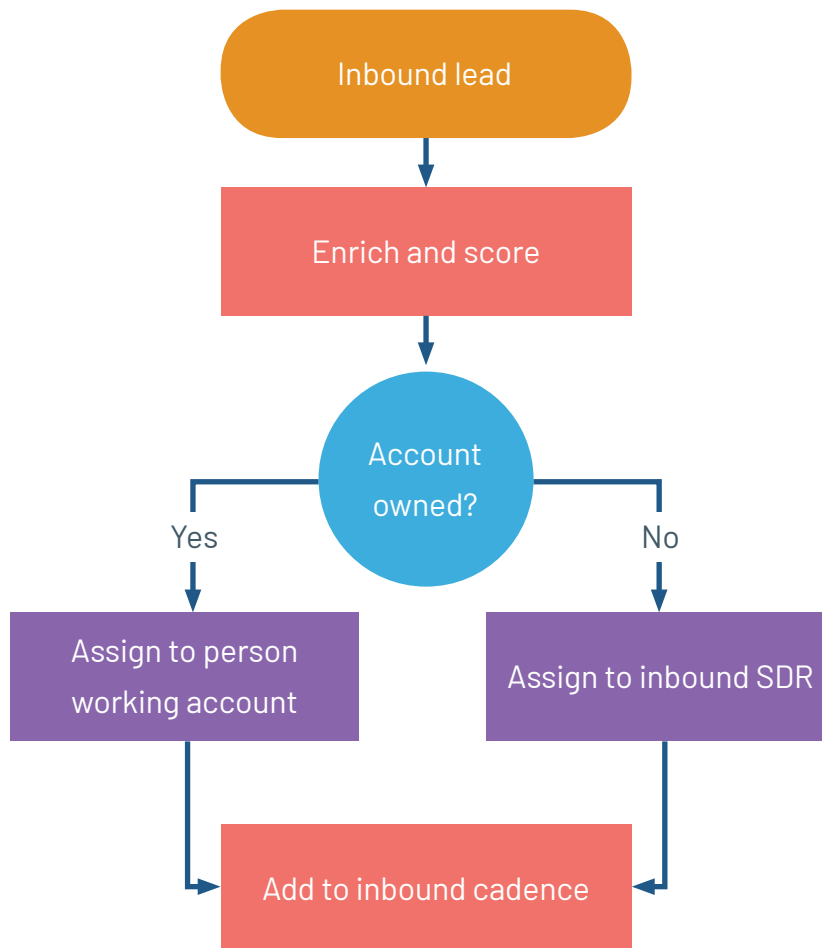
After the lead is added to a cadence, it triggers an initial automated email response. Keep in mind that, while the email is automated, it is coming from a real person. That real human being will receive the reply and execute additional steps in the cadence.

Here's what that email might look like:

Hi George,

Thanks for your interest in SalesLoft! Looking forward to learning more about your team.

I'm sending this email as step one of a follow up cadence built inside of SalesLoft. Step two is to hop on a call to answer any intial questions, learn more about your team, and set up a demo.

When would be a good time for us to connect for a 15 minute video conference? If it's easier, here is a link to my calendar. Pick a time that works for you below!

Book a meeting with Jeremey Donovan

Thanks,

But we don't just send an initial email and pray for a reply. A human salesperson will execute a series of touches (remember tip 3?) to earn a response from the prospect.

Here is what the first 4 days of our inbound response cadence consists of:

Day	Email	Phone	Social
1	1[a]	1[b],2[c]	
2		3[b],4[c]	1
3	2	5[b],6[c]	
4	3		

[a]Automated   [b]AM   [c]PM

Additionally: Day 1: Data integrity check   Day 5: Move to nurture cadence

Now is always the best time to email.

Don't sweat day-of-week or time-of-day too much. The reality is that you are better off ignoring it since **you'll get zero replies if you send zero emails**.

Monday AM is best (**25%** over sample average) since people have time, energy, and motivation to attack their inbox. And yes, weekends are bad.
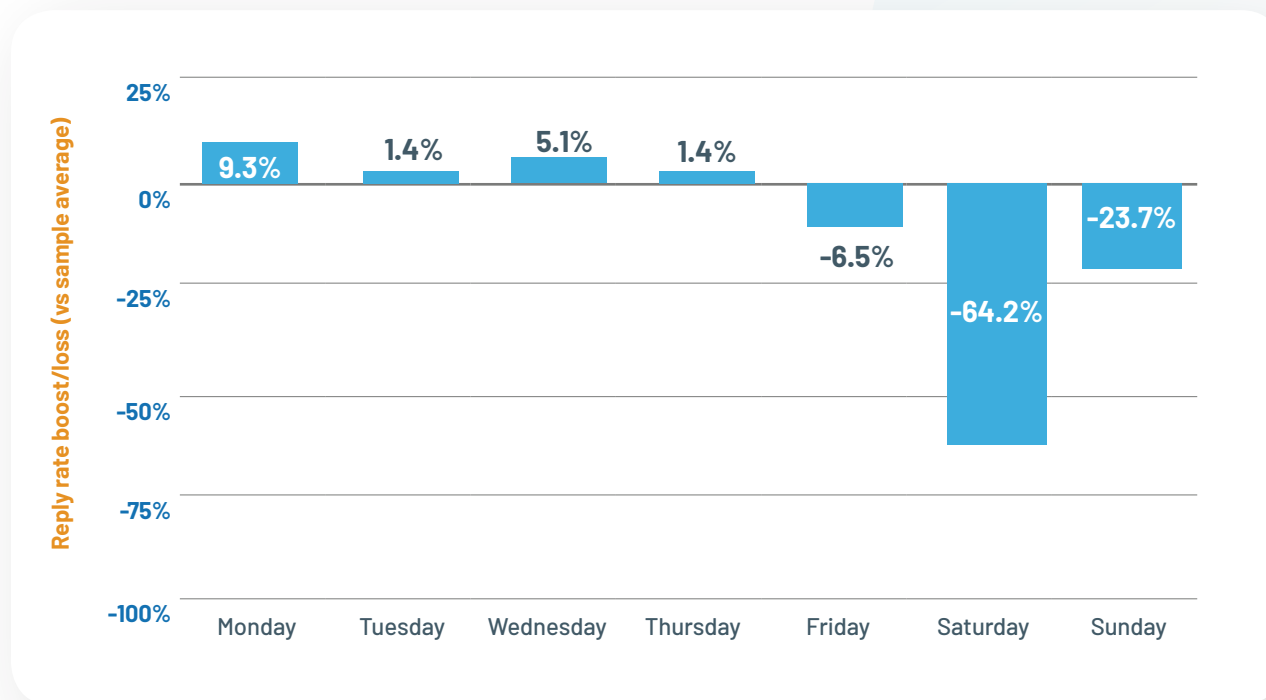

There is no major difference in time of day effectiveness other than Monday AM (25% better than sample average) and Sat PM + Sun AM (71% worse than sample average).

Sender gender doesn't matter.

Though reply rates from female senders are statistically higher, the absolute difference is near 0. However, it's interesting to note that women are **13%** more likely to reply to a sales email (not shown).
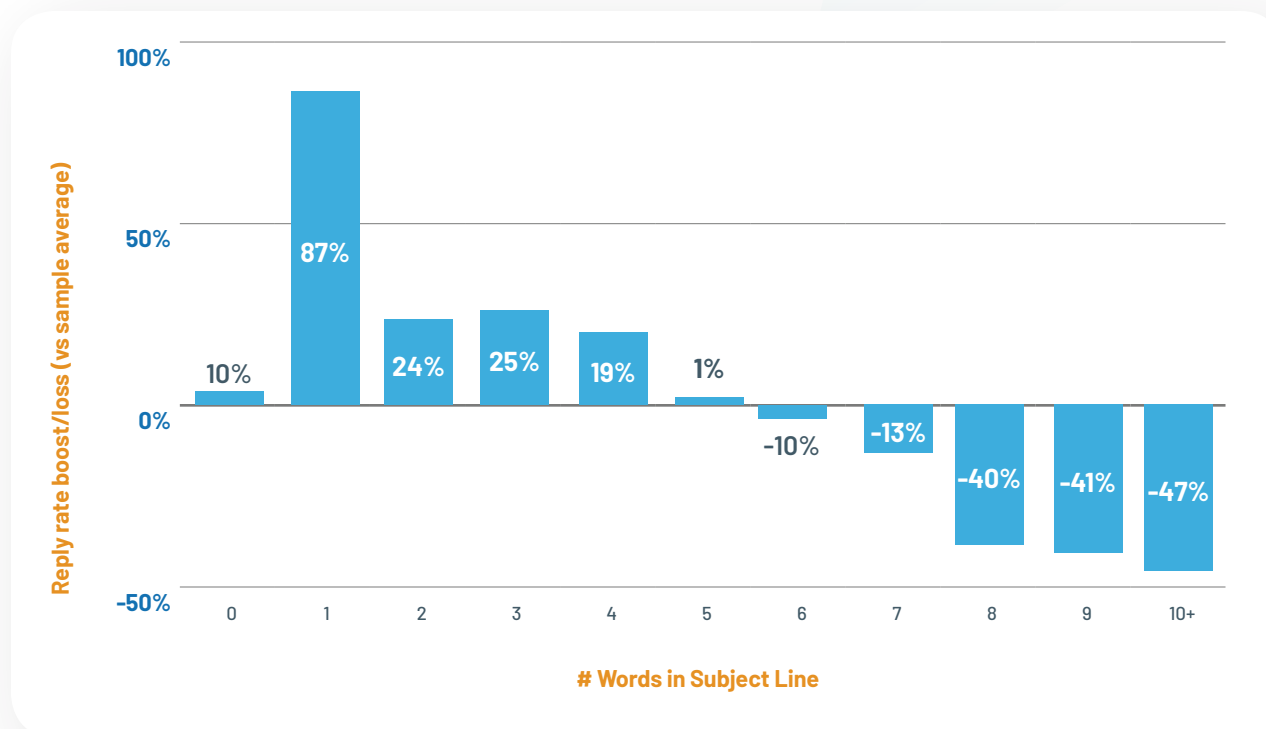
N = 20 million; z-stat = 7.5
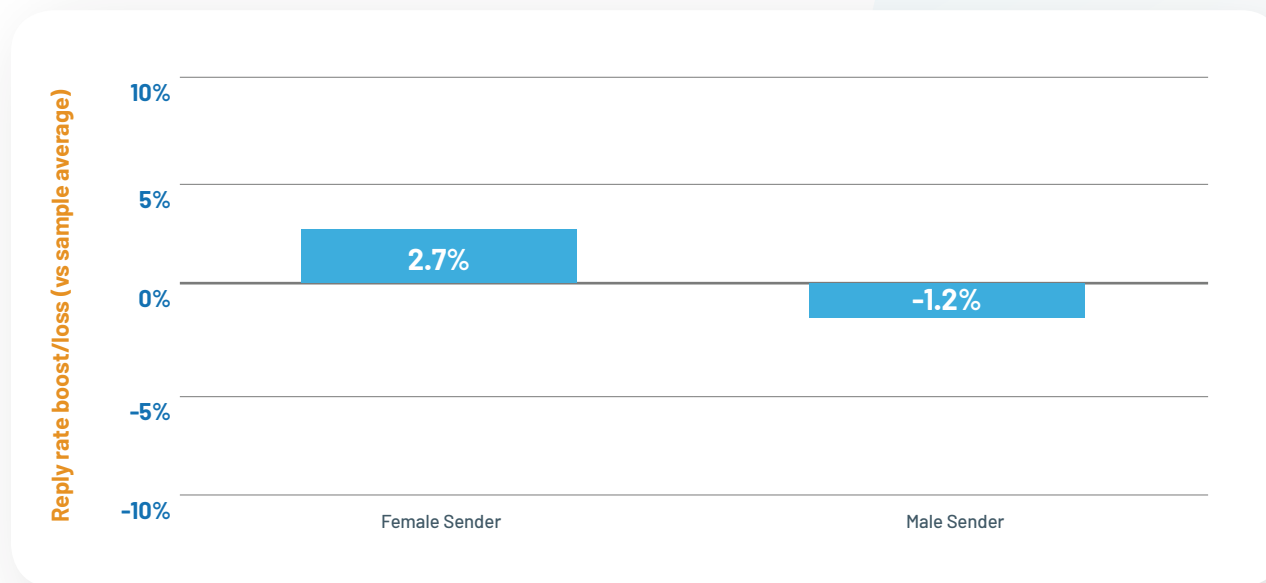
Subject lines

Craft subject lines with 1 to 4 words.

Empty subject lines perform better than average but are suboptimal and can come off as sneaky.

At 6 words in a subject line, bad things start to happen to reply rate.

Examples of 1-word subject lines:

- Hey
- <<Sender company>>
- meeting

Reply rate boost/loss (vs sample average) vs # Words in Subject Line:
- 0: 10%
- 1: 87%
- 2: 24%
- 3: 25%
- 4: 19%
- 5: 1%
- 6: -10%
- 7: -13%
- 8: -40%
- 9: -41%
- 10+: -47%

ALL CAPS beats all lowercase…
but we don't recommend it.

YOU WOULD GET NUMB TO ALL CAPS PRETTY QUICKLY IF EVERYONE WROTE LIKE THIS.

(Sorry. We didn't mean to yell.)

Chart — Reply rate boost/loss (vs sample average):

	Reply rate boost/loss (vs sample average)
lowercase	-9%
ALL CAPS	11%
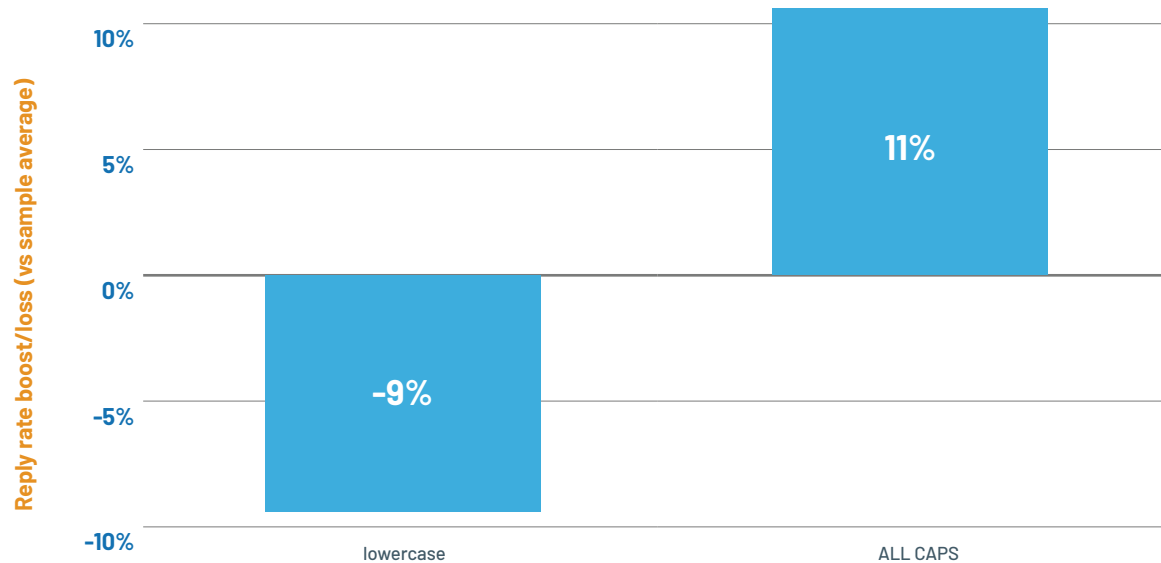
Asterisks work better than other types of subject line punctuation.

A good rule of thumb is to use punctuation sparingly and authentically. Here are a few hypotheses we've developed:

- Asterisks are attention-grabbing

- Exclamation marks are fine

- Questions demand effort

- Commas are a sign your subject line is too long
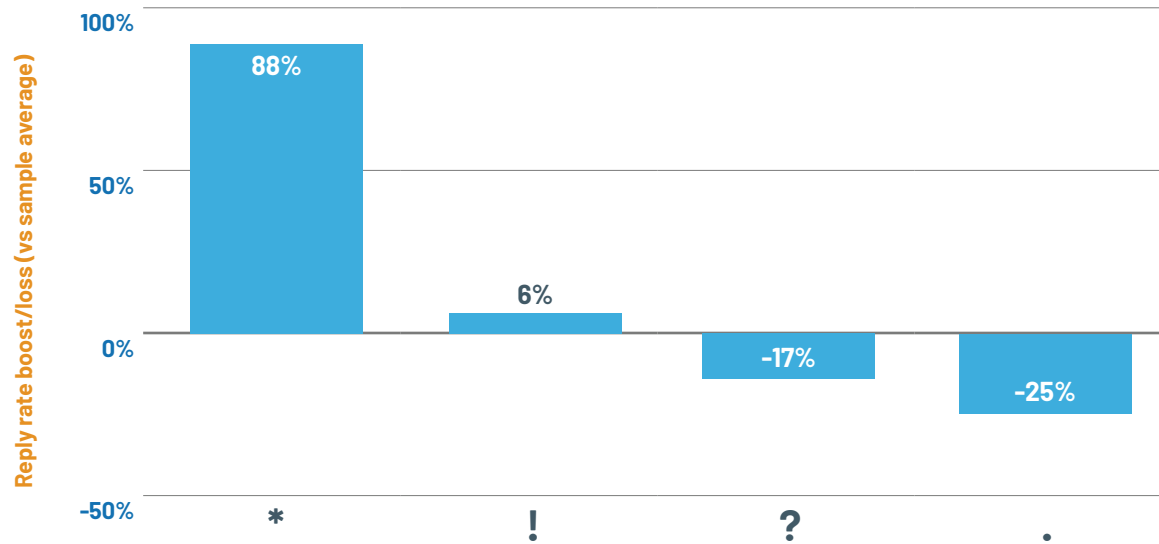
Numbers in subject lines are not good.

Based on our research, we believe that the general sentiment is that impersonal marketing emails are more likely to use numbers in subject lines. Therefore, they're more likely to be rejected.
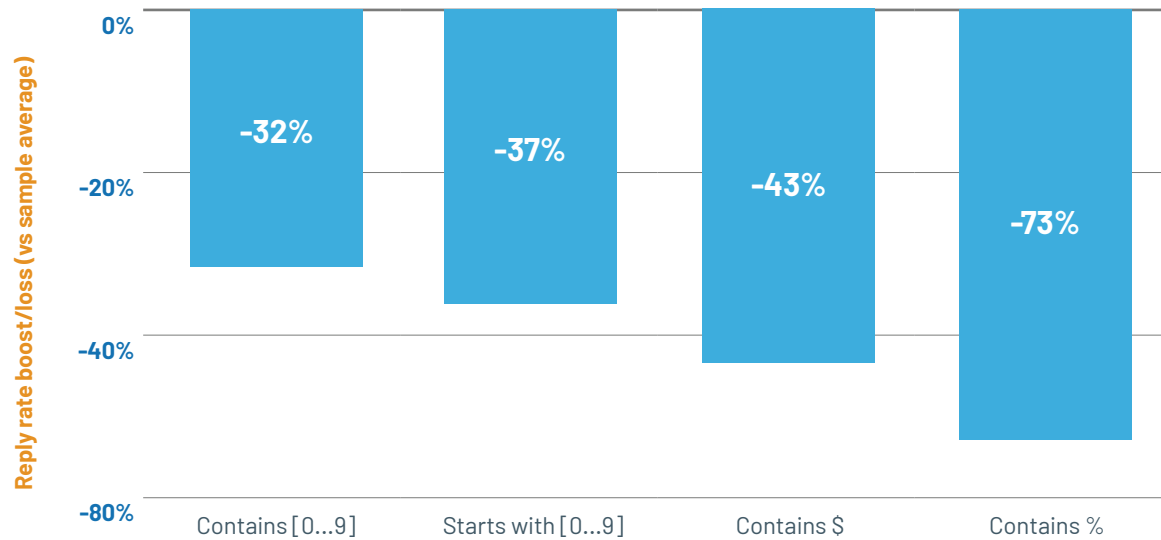
In subject lines, it is better to mention your own company than the recipient's name or company.

This seems to indicate two things, one bad and one good:

1. You would not put a colleague's first name in a subject line (it may be a signal of spam), and

2. The use of the sender's company ties directly to the content of the email (this is a good thing).
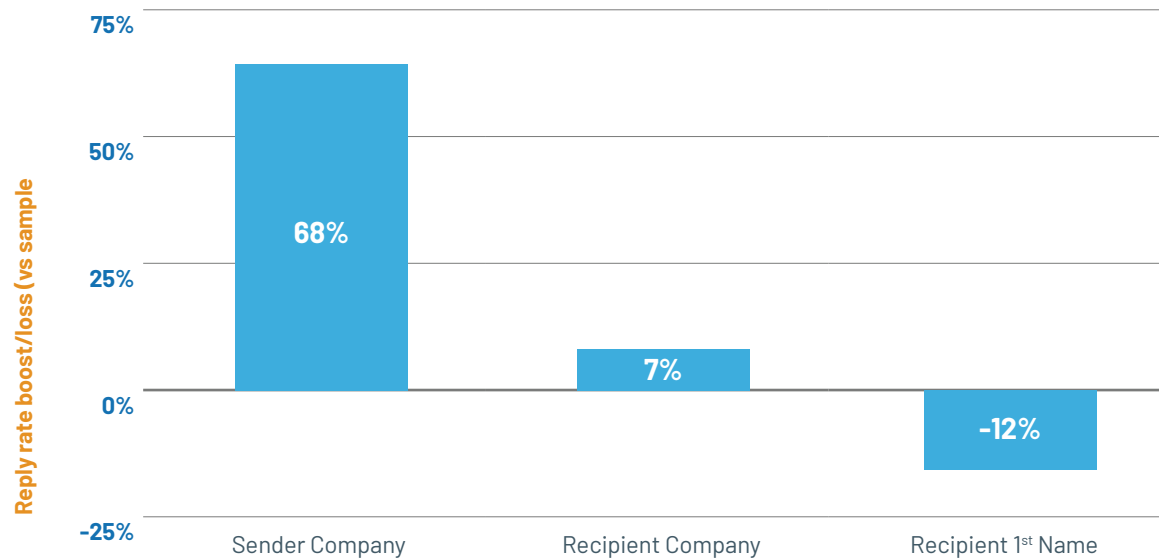
Greetings work in subject lines.

We studied the use of "Hello," "Hi," and "Hey." It appears that "Hello" is the right balance of pleasant, honest, and slight informality.
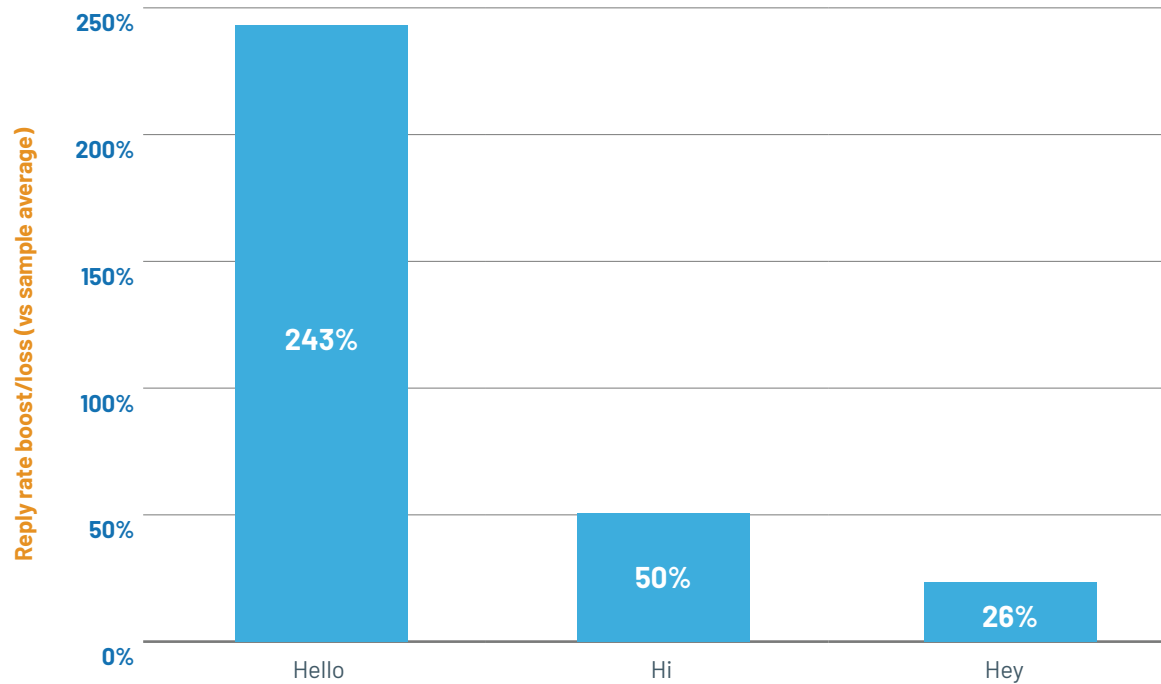
If you were referred, say it in the subject.

Unsurprisingly, referrals remain the single best way to engage prospects. Ask for referrals and don't be shy about using them to get in the door with a prospect. It could deliver over a 500% return on your reply rate!
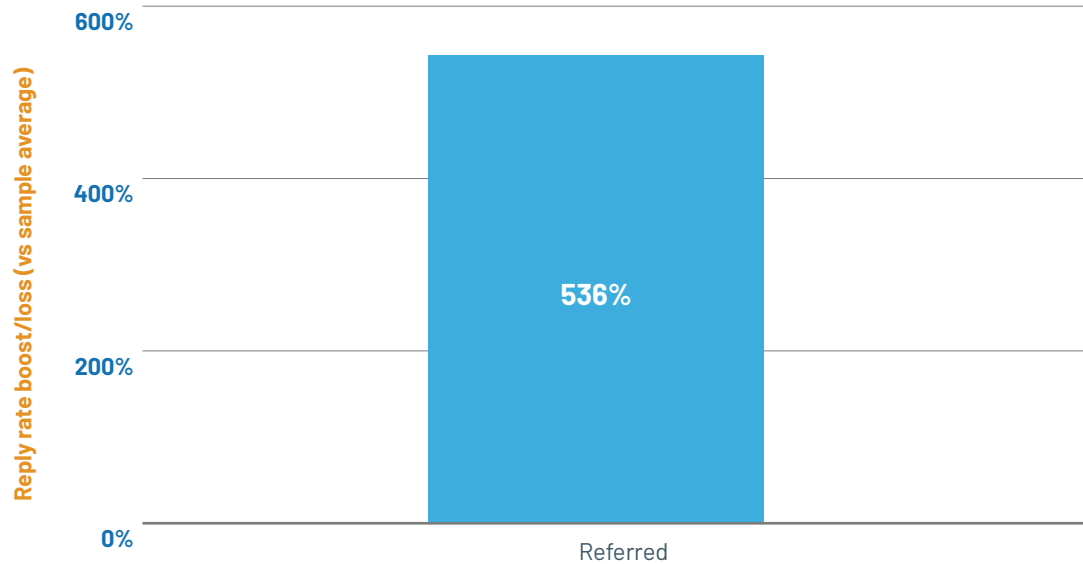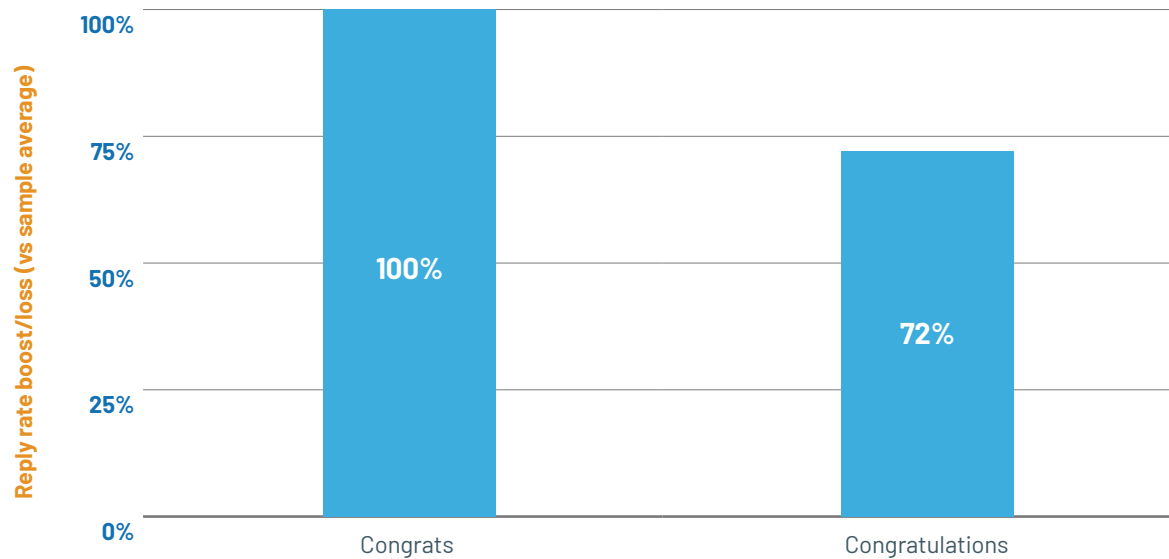
Flattery remains highly effective.

You know the saying "flattery will get you everywhere"? It's not wrong.

Both "Congrats" and "Congratulations" yielded big returns in subject lines. Of the two, the shorter, friendlier "Congrats" is your best bet for a reply.
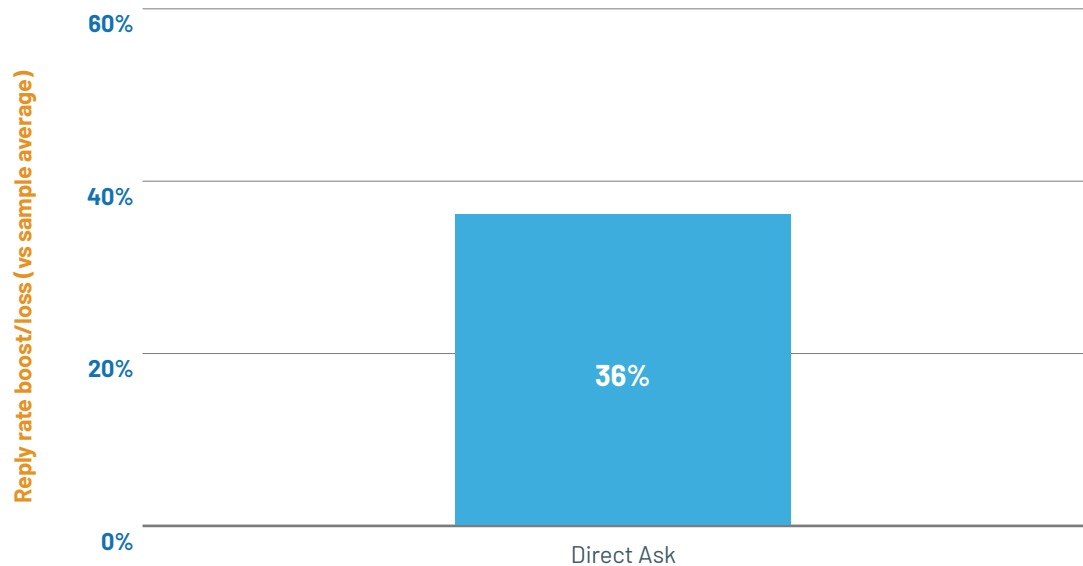
Ask (directly) and you shall receive.

You build trust when your subject and body are upfront and honest. Be direct.

Direct ask words include:

- Request
- Reconnect
- Call
- Meeting
- Direction
- Introduction

- Advice
- Talk
- Chat
- Person
- Connect
- Help

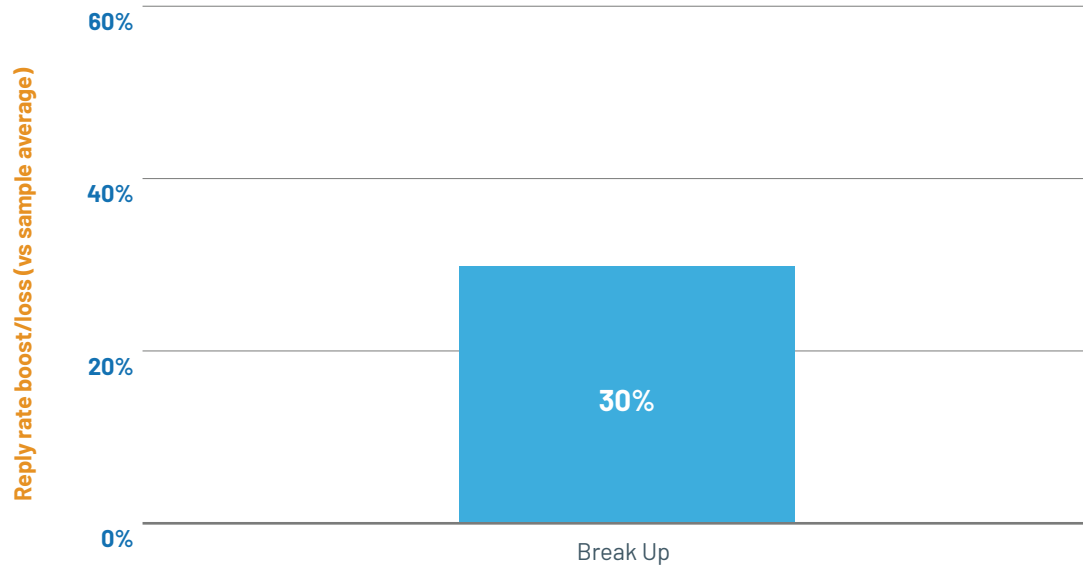- Time
- Meet
- Min
- Mins
- Minutes
- Minute

Break up language is still working.

Loss aversion is a powerful motivator. ~~Not much has changed since high school.~~

Breaking up is hard to do, but the good news is that break up language has become more professional. People tend to use words like: adieu, bugging, missed, wrong, miss, goodbye, and bye.

Avoid "influence and persuasion" language in subject lines.

Gains, urgency, and hyperbole are indicators of spam or a disingenuous communication.

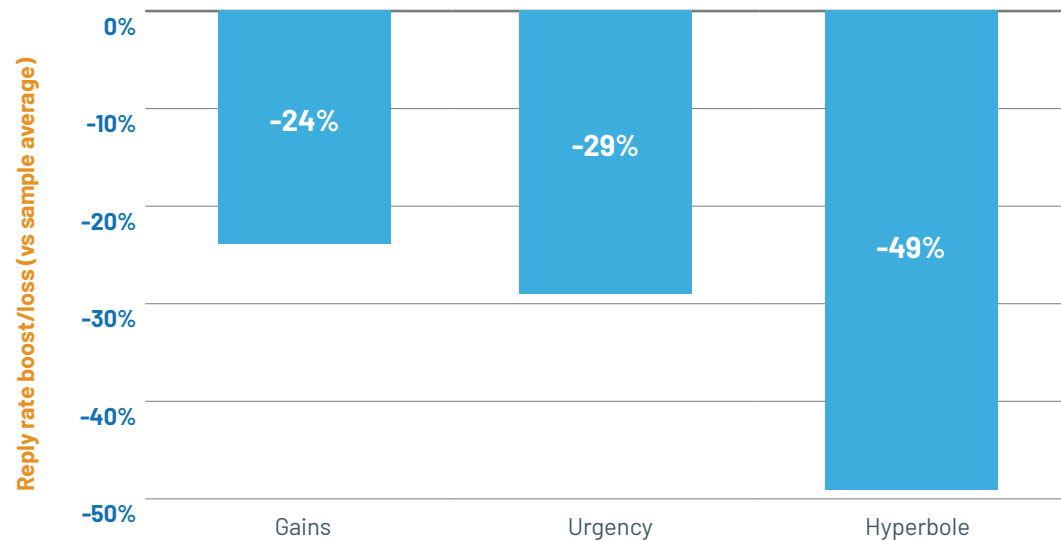## Here are some specific words to avoid using:

"Gains" words

guaranteed; special; quick; exclusive; new; free; better; best; revenue; value; increase; offer; valuable; save; savings; ROI

"Urgency" words

need; limited; now; ready; only; last; final; deadline; only
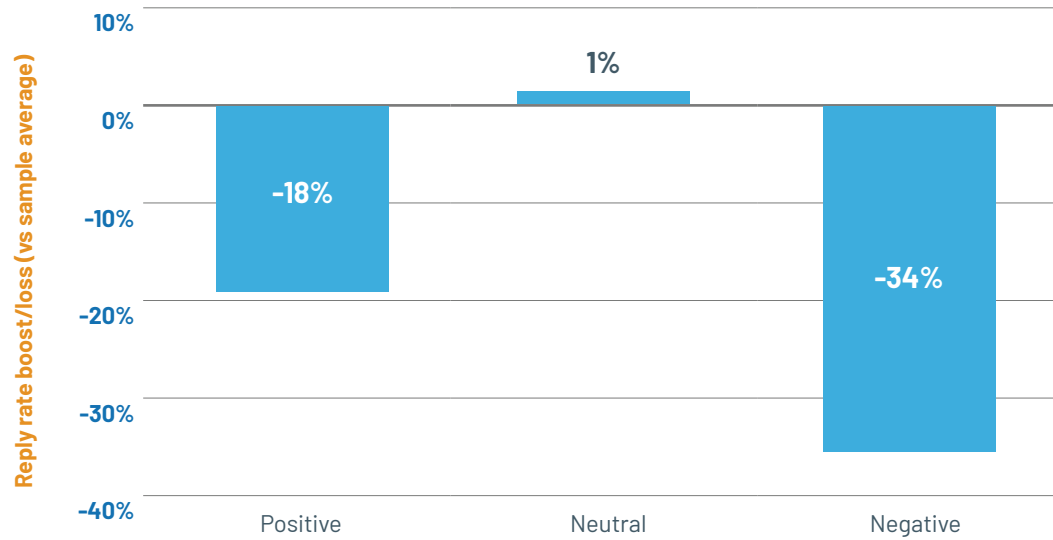
"Hyperbole" words

fantastic; amazing; awesome; ultimate

29

Use a neutral tone for subject lines.

It may seem to go against your instincts, but a neutral tone comes across as professional and authentic. Being overly positive or too negative is likely to damage your reply rate.
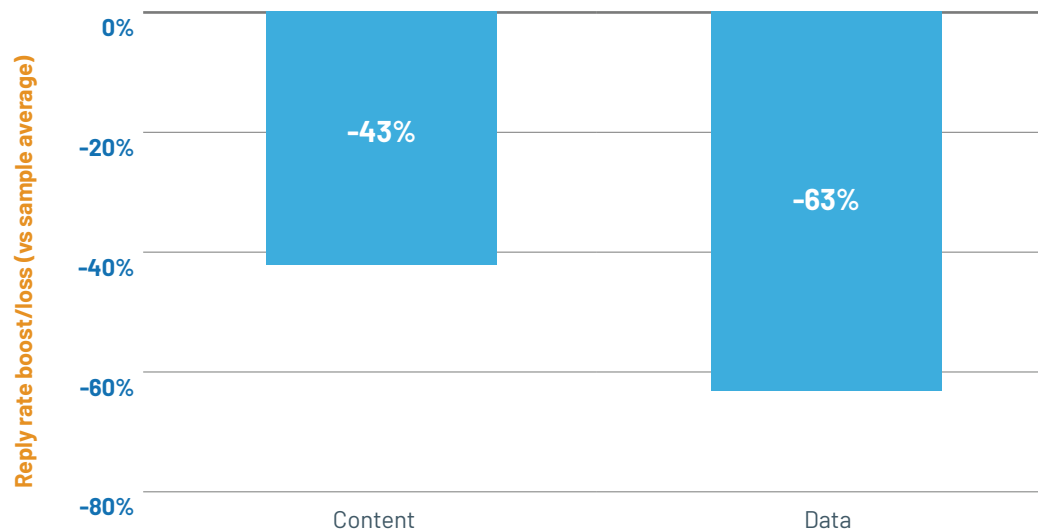
Gives don't get (immediate) replies.

It could simply be that "gives" are not expected to get replies. *shrug*

When we offer content or data, our reply rates decrease. But did we expect it... or were we simply trying to stay fresh and add value?

Chart showing Reply rate boost/loss (vs sample average):
- Content: -43%
- Data: -63%

You/your are ineffective.

Adding "you" and "your" has long been popular advice. Too long, in fact. Much like the man bun, it's gone out of style. Prospects associate the technique with spam.
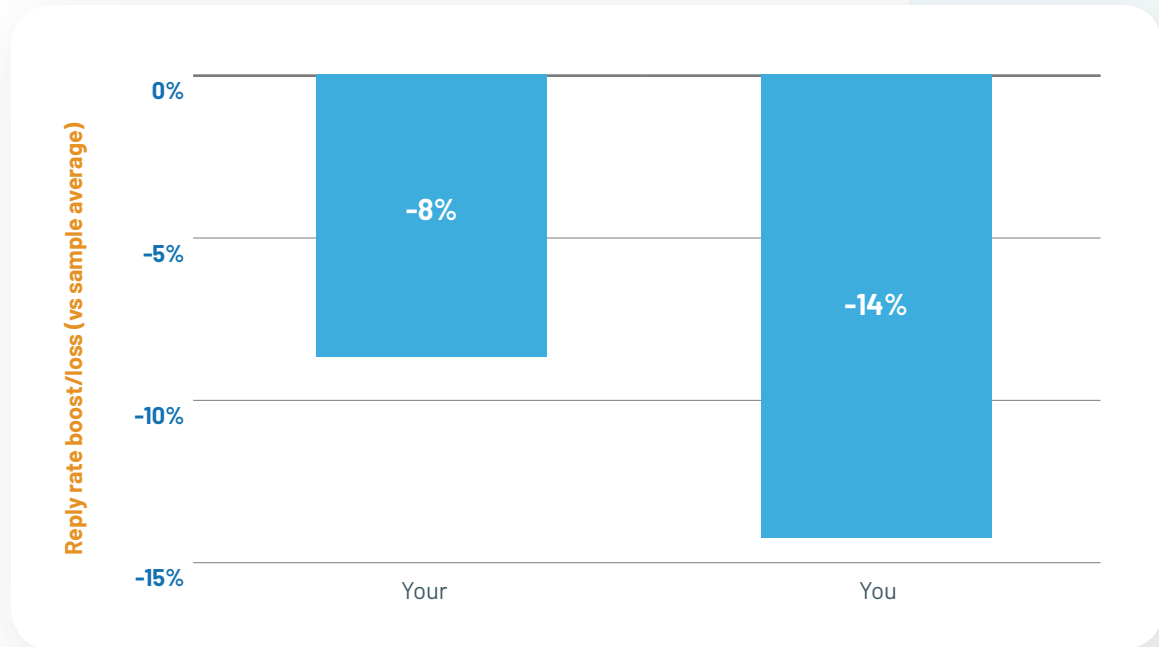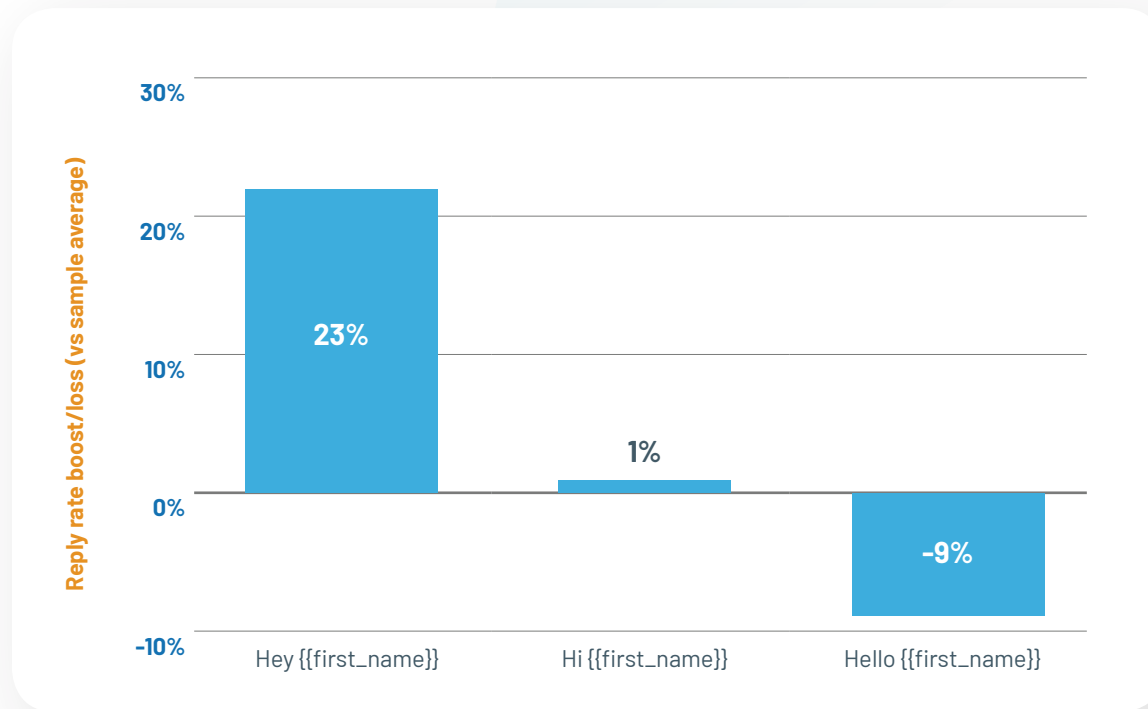
Greeting and email body

Better to start with "Hey Jane" than simply "Jane."

"Hey {{Name}}" mixes the friendly with the formal. It's approachable, yet the inclusion of a name indicates professionalism. Plus, the use of two words packs a one-two punch.

Hey {{First Name}} is the most effective greeting.

Also, "hey" works better than the more formal "hi" or "hello." Balance the professional with the approachable to stand out.

Reply rate boost/loss (vs sample average)

30%	
20%	
10%	
0%	
-10%	

- Hey {{first_name}}: 23%
- Hi {{first_name}}: 1%
- Hello {{first_name}}: -9%

Personalize up to 20% of your emails to double your reply rate.

We've done a lot of research on personalization. Here's a quick summary that will help you apply it most effectively.

1. There are rapid gains to personalization up to 20%.

2. There's a lose-lose zone over 80% (more time = less impact).

3. We see many clients using a 10-80-10 rule. Meaning, they personalize the first and last 10% of an email.
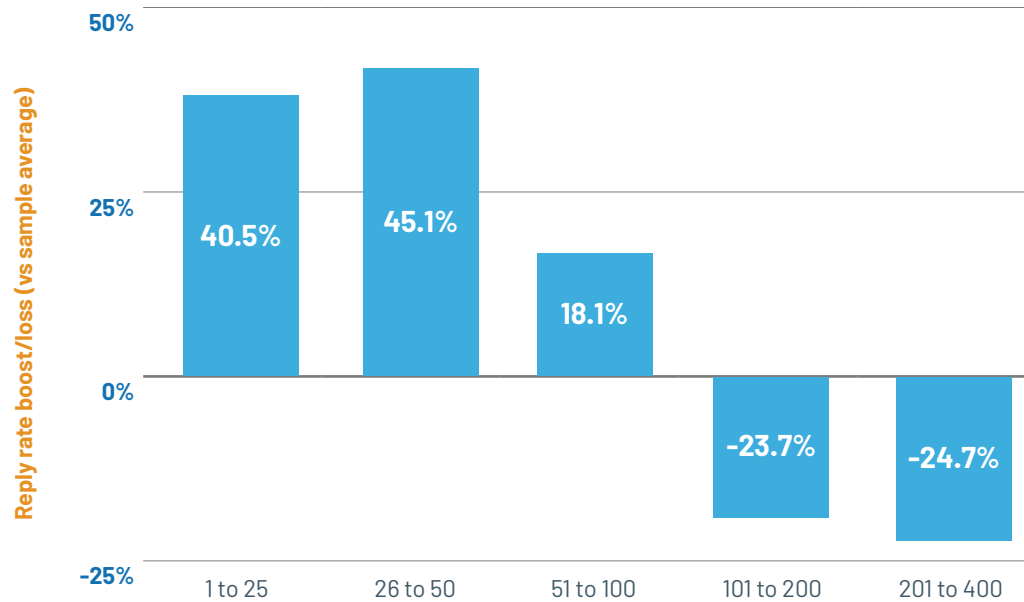

Proportion of Personalization
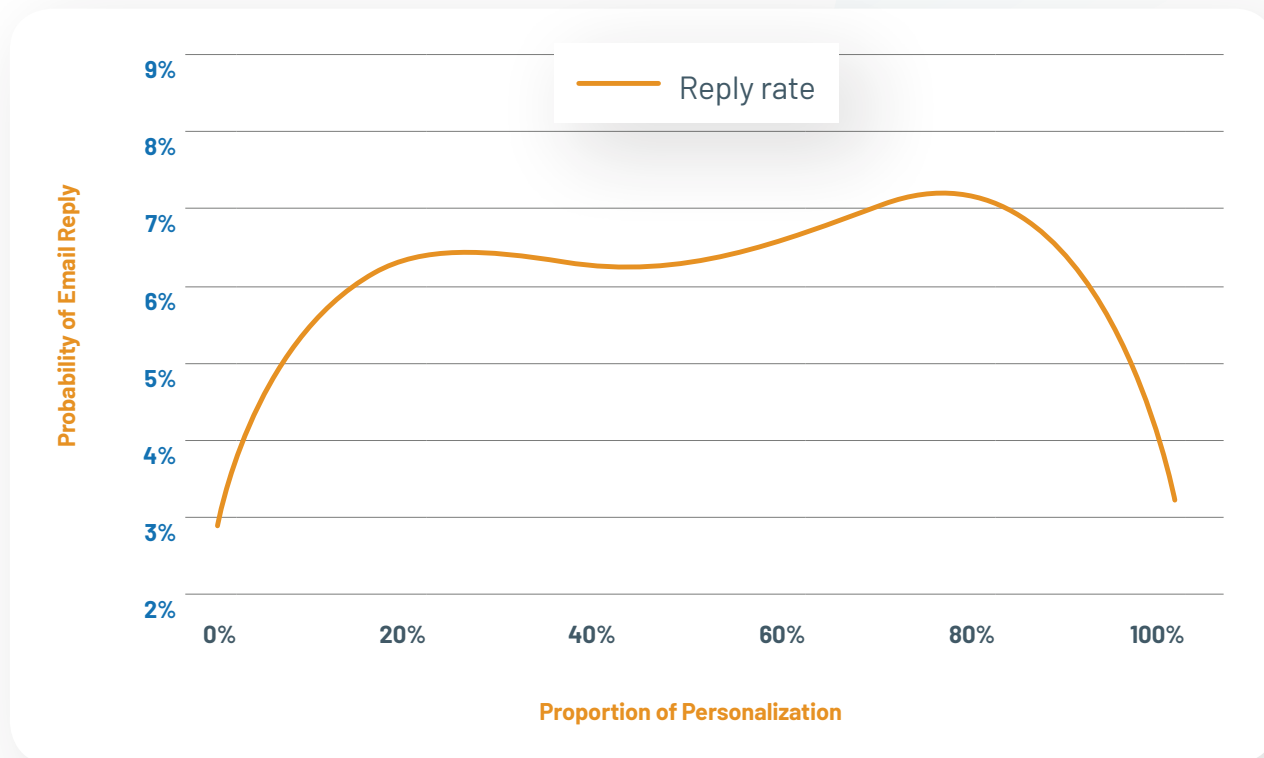
Keep your emails short 'n sweet.

Too many words may cause people to tune out. People are busy... and usually, they're reading emails on-the-go via their cell phones.

Note: Included in the word count are the salutation and signature. It excludes confidentiality notices and any threaded reply/forward content.

Reply rate boost/loss (vs sample average)

Word count	Reply rate boost/loss
1 to 25	40.5%
26 to 50	45.1%
51 to 100	18.1%
101 to 200	-23.7%
201 to 400	-24.7%

No need to get fancy with words.

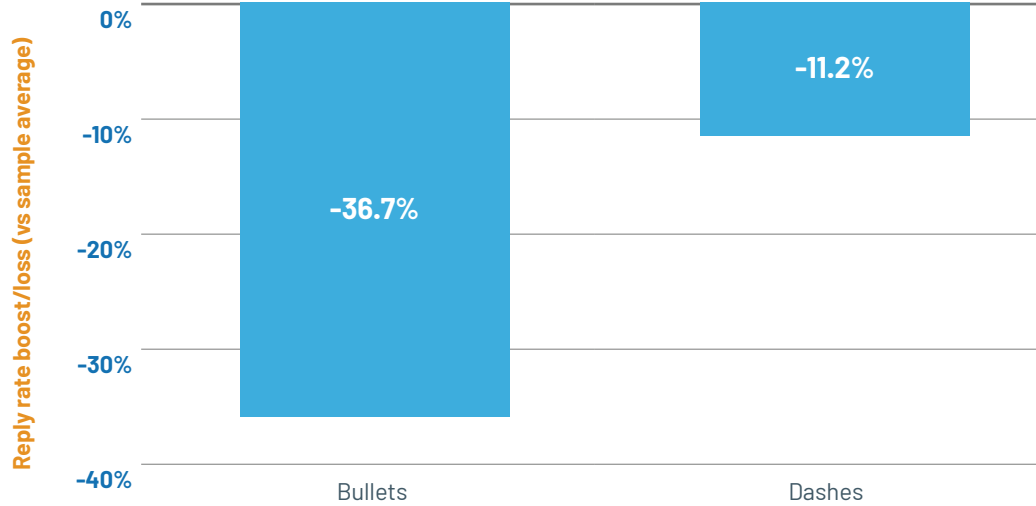It's the KISS principle. A simple message gets right to the point. There's no vagueness. Clarity promotes trust.
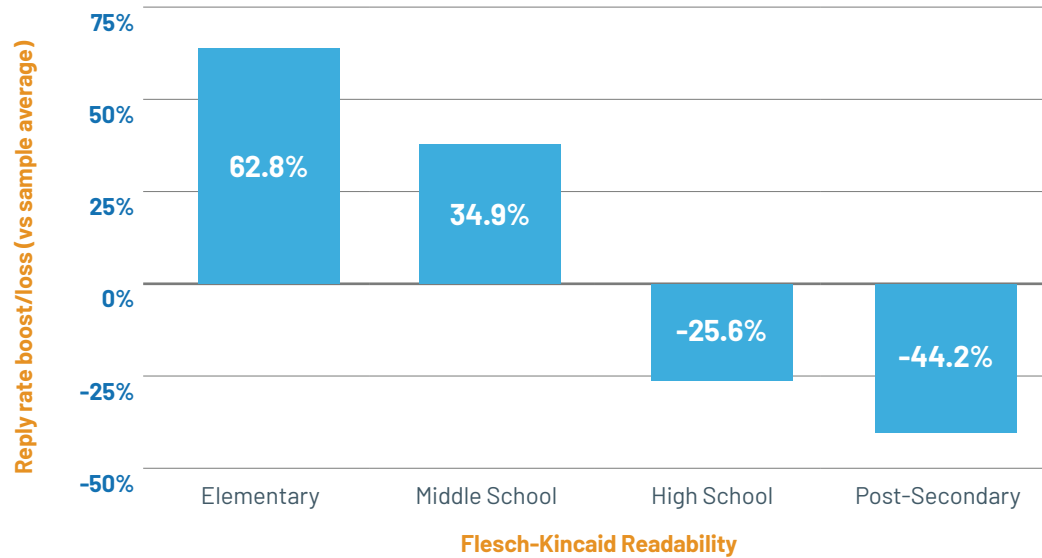
Avoid bullets or dashes.

If you need bullets or dashes, your email is probably too long. Also, it looks like marketing speak. (Again with the "KISS-ing.")
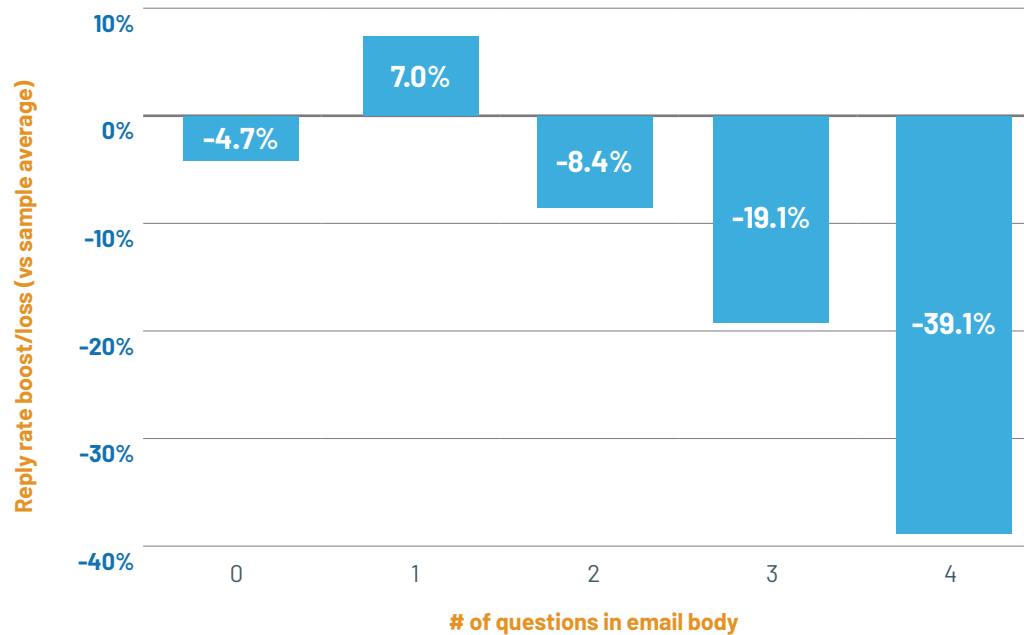
There is one caveat. If you must use a list format, dashes are better since they avoid HTML.

It is okay to ask one question.

Asking too many questions causes cognitive overload. It also risks looking like spam. Stick to one. (See a theme here? Simplicity.)

Chart: Reply rate boost/loss (vs sample average) by # of questions in email body

- 0: -4.7%
- 1: 7.0%
- 2: -8.4%
- 3: -19.1%
- 4: -39.1%

Minimize the use of hyperlinks.

Links make emails look generic. They also add suspicion... they look too much like a promotional email.
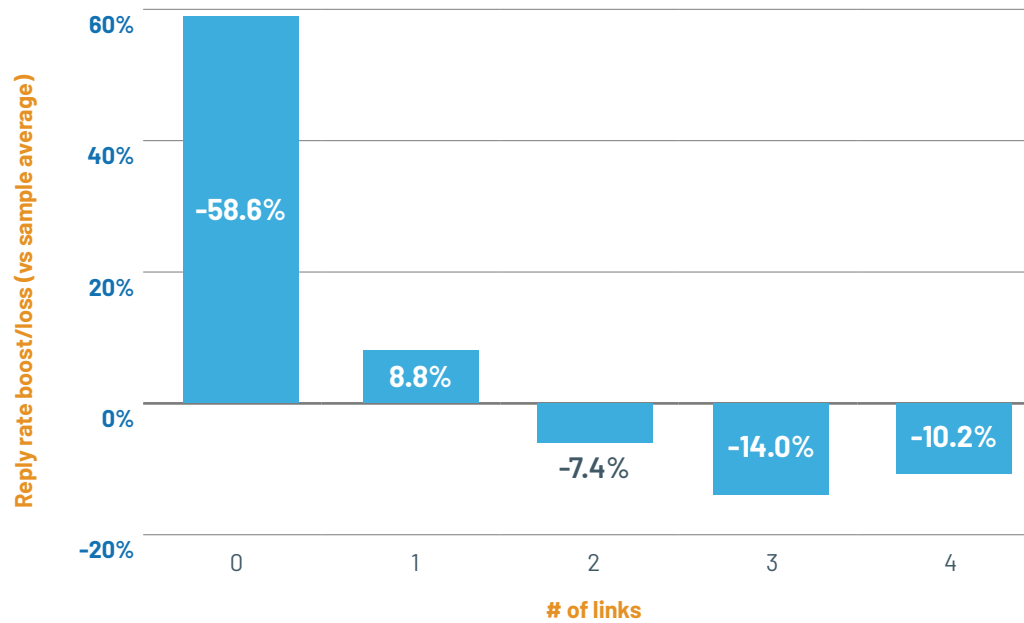
Video increases reply rates by 25%.

We analyzed 134 million emails. Of those, 4.5 million (3.3%) contained video.

Emails containing a video increased the reply rate by 25%. Some of this could be the novelty of embedded video… but that doesn't make it wrong!

Average Video Reply Rate

Reply rate boost/loss (vs sample average)

|	
No Video	8.0%
Video	10.1%
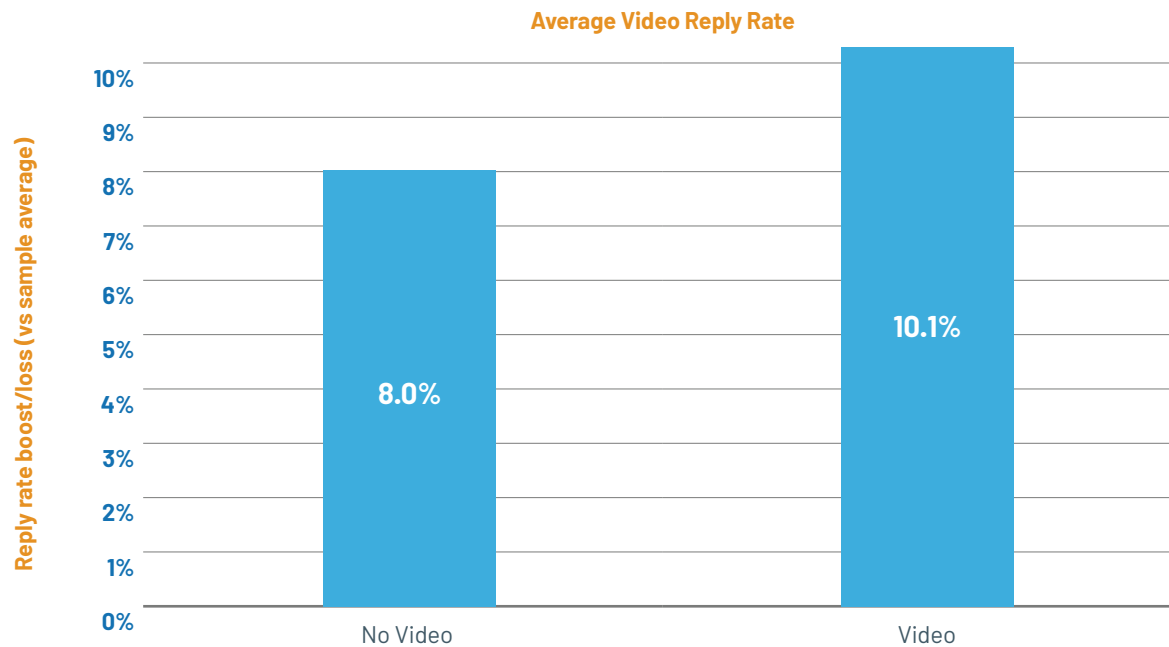
Practical Application

Video performs best when it is used between Day 2 and Day 20 in a cadence. In our sample, the best day was Day 5.

Pro tip: By waiting until after the initial email, you know you are at least sending to a good email address.

When you send that email, include 200 to 600 characters before your embedded video.

In an ideal world, the intro would be about 5 sentences or about 400 characters.
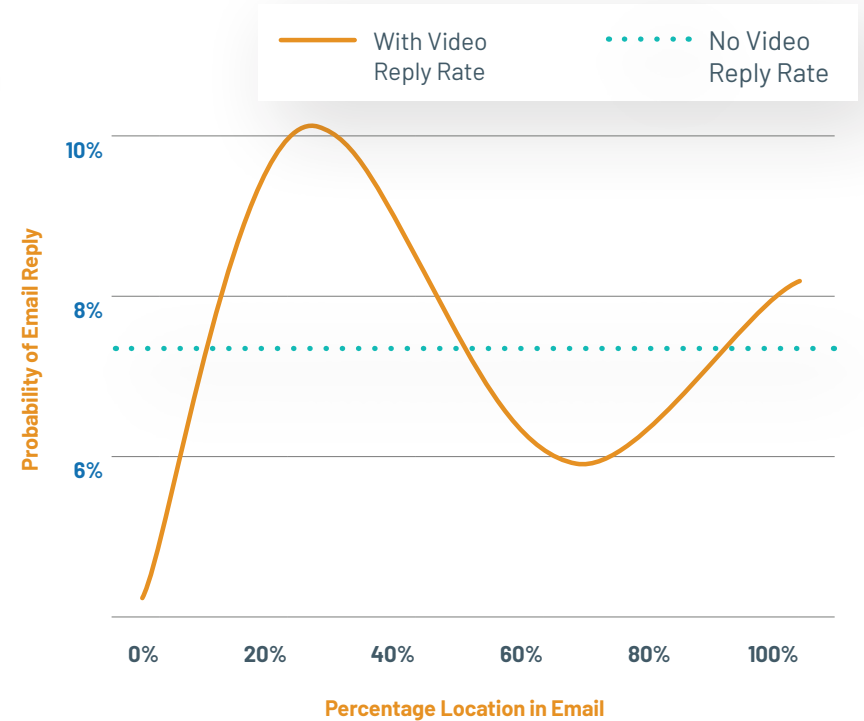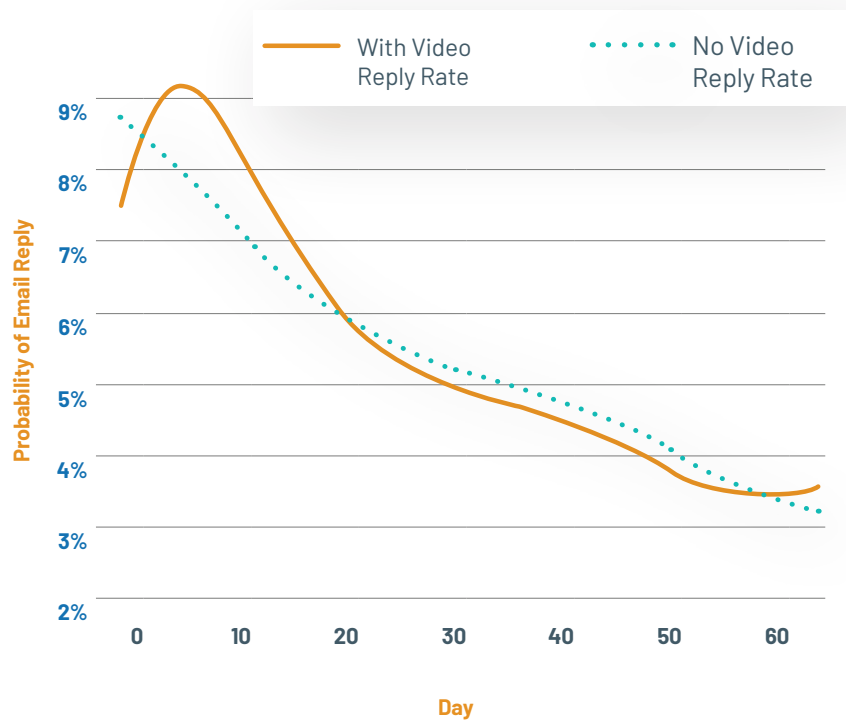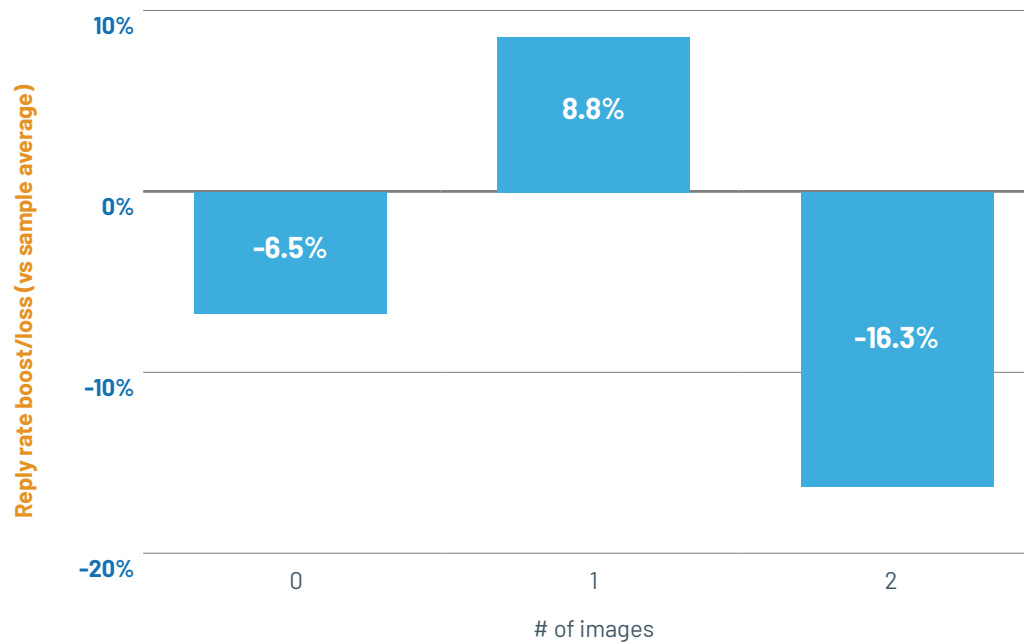
Including one image is a-okay.

A single relevant image is attention-grabbing.

As with video, consider using an image in the second email (or later)... with a personalized introduction.

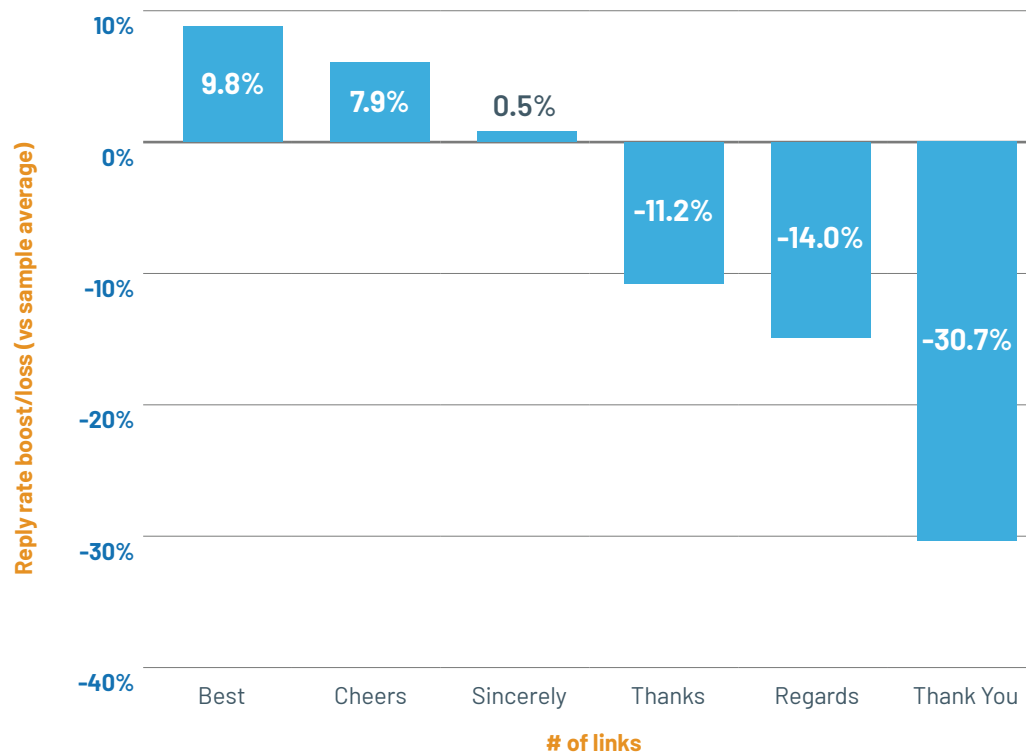# Signature (and beyond)

The best way to sign off is… "Best."

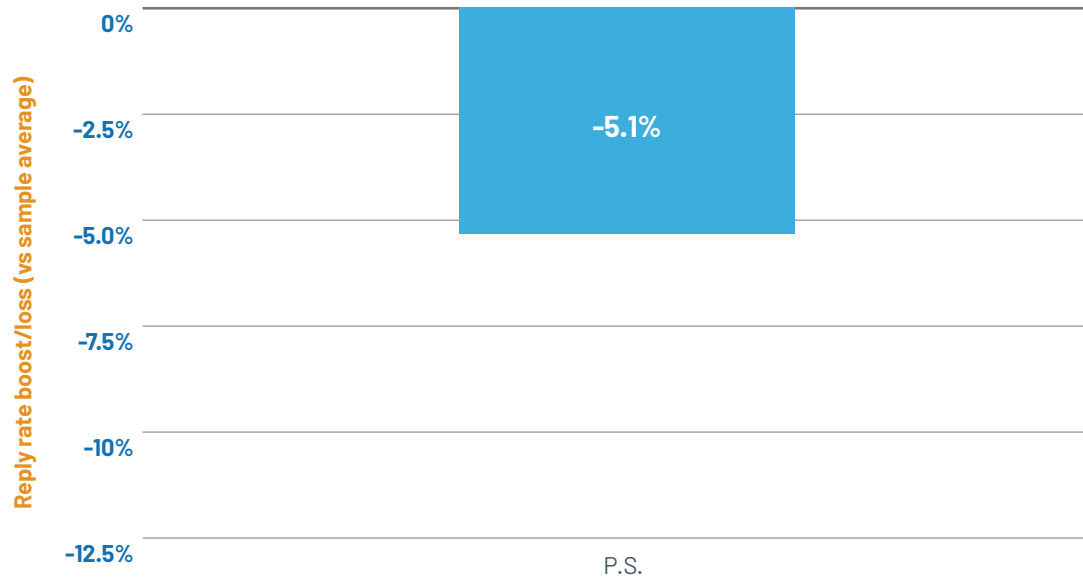Not "Thanks" … or "Sincerely" … not even "Cheers." The best way to end an email is "Best."

Note: "Please advise" also works very well, but is not shown due to the small sample size.

Skip the P.S.

Friends don't typically send emails to friends with a "P.S." at the end. Keep it real.

Reply rate boost/loss (vs sample average)

0%	
-2.5%	**-5.1%**
-5.0%	
-7.5%	
-10%	
-12.5%	P.S.

By personalizing, you get to remove the opt-out.

The added benefit of personalizing is that you can often ditch the opt-out. Of course, make sure leaving it off is legal. (But it typically is with a personal email.)

Reply rate boost/loss (vs sample average)

- 0%
- -20%
- -40%
- -60%
- -80%

-38.1%

Opt-out

47
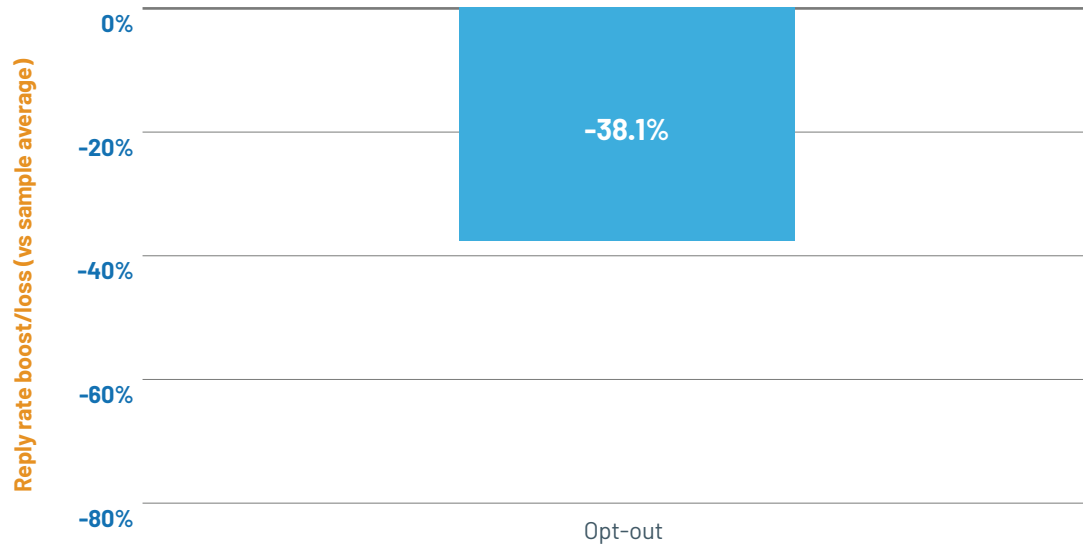
BOTTOM LINE

You made it. You're an email expert!

By adopting even a fraction of these tips, your email game is sure to reach the next level.

This may feel like a lot to remember. Break it down and experiment with one or two at a time. That way it's not so overwhelming and you will really be able to tell what impacts your reply rates.

Remember... be pleasantly persistent!

SalesLoft

About us

SalesLoft is the #1 sales engagement platform, helping sales organizations deliver a better sales experience for their customers. More than 2,000 customers use the company's category-leading sales engagement platform to engage in more relevant, authentic, and sincere ways, including Facebook, MuleSoft, Square, WeWork, and Zoom.

Headquartered in Atlanta, SalesLoft has additional offices in San Francisco, New York, London, and Guadalajara, Mexico. SalesLoft has more than 400 employees and was recognized as the #1 best place to work in Atlanta for the second year in a row. The company was also named the 7th Fastest-Growing Technology Company in North America by Deloitte and recently hailed by The New York Times as a start-up that 'may be the next unicorn… on a path to a $1B valuation.'

For more information on SalesLoft and how to deliver a better sales experience, visit **salesloft.com**.

f **◉** **𝕏** **in** *@salesloft*