matchstick

Effective email campaigns: step-by-step guide

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👋 Introduction

Cold email. Much maligned, feared by many, and misunderstood by most. Not to be confused with spam, it remains the most cost effective channel for generating new business if done correctly. And those three little words carry a lot on their shoulders, because doing cold email correctly is easier said than done.

Fear not for Matchstick has your back. We're here to guide you through the email minefield, avoiding junk folders and spam traps, delivering you safely into your ideal clients' primary inbox and getting their eyes on your message.

It's estimated that 347bn emails are sent every day. Almost 47% of them are considered spam. ESPs (email service providers) such as Google, Outlook and Yahoo have declared war against spam and regularly introduce new deliverability guidelines and sender requirements, so landing in the primary inbox is getting harder every day.

With that in mind, let's crack on with this step-by-step guide to ensuring your emails get the eyeballs they deserve, helping you generate leads and drive new business.

📧 Proxy domains and email addresses

Even with the most cautious approach to cold emailing we have to accept that over time, the domain we're using will eventually get burned. Domain health and reputation degrades to the point whereby the email address can no longer be used. It's possible to rehabilitate them by sending them back through the warm-up process which we outline later.

With that in mind, we **never** use our primary domain, and always purchase a proxy for cold email campaigns. We currently have 15+ that we rotate in and out of campaigns.`

Example:

Main domain: thematchstick.co
Proxy domains: thematchstick.co.uk, thematchstick.eu, etc.

With pretty much everything we do, we want to be doing the opposite of what spam/scam artists are doing.

So if you can, purchase your email address and do nothing with it for a couple of weeks. Because what do spammers do? They typically purchase multiple domains/email addresses and put them to work the next day.

There's even a fairly common error message that rejects your email because the domain hasn't been in use for long enough. By waiting we minimise the risk of getting this error and ensure our sending behaviour is natural and not spam-like.

🔐 Authenticate your domain

It’s absolutely vital that you set up SPF, DKIM, and DMARC records for your domain. These authentication protocols help establish your email’s legitimacy and improve deliverability.

The first time you do this will be challenging, but every domain registration and hosting company (e.g. GoDaddy) and ESP will provide thorough documentation and support to help you muddle your way through.

As a side note, both GoDaddy and Google Workspace provide exceptional phone/live chat support in this regard. Microsoft, not so great.

🔆 Warm-up process

1-2 weeks after setting up our proxy email addresses, we start warming them up. Email warm-up is a service that help ensure optimal deliverability. It means sending a gradually increasing number of emails from a new email account with the aim of building a positive reputation with email providers.

For this we use Mailflow, which automates 4-way conversations with 10+ other email accounts. Warm up your inboxes for at least 2-4 weeks (longer better) before sending any cold emails from them.

All inboxes perpetually stay in “warm-up” as it helps domain reputation. There is some discourse around whether ESPs are onto this but we’ve found no evidence to suggest that this is the case.

💎 Deep dive into ICP (Ideal Client Profile)

If you haven’t already done this for marketing purposes, it’s essential to establish who you are targeting. Think of an individual, not a company, for deeper engagement.

- What is their role?

● What skills do they possess?

● What are their responsibilities and how is their work measured?

● Who do they report to and who else might be involved in the decision making process?

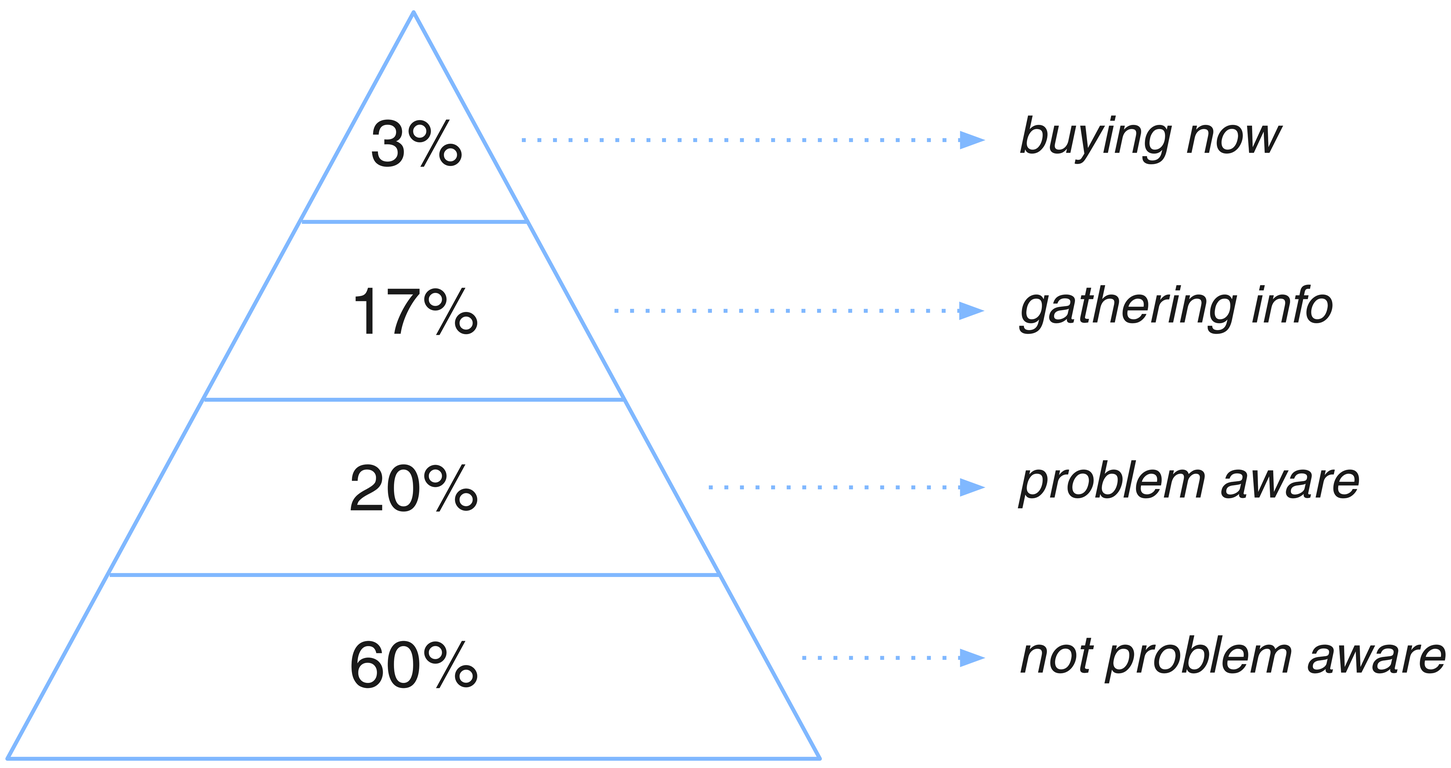
● What are their problems, challenges, and pain points?

● What are the personal characteristics of your best clients? What do you have in common with them? What makes you excited about the prospect of working with them again?

Once you’ve clarified who the individual is, it's time to consider where they work.

- Number of employees
- Geographic location
- Annual revenue
- Industry type

🎯 The buyer's pyramid



The buyer's pyramid is a tool for visualising the available market for your product or service. It describes various states a prospect can be in on their buying journey.

Another way of framing the top 3 states in relation to our email campaign is relevance. It means focusing our efforts on not only who we target (ICP) but when we target them.

One way we can do this is through triggers, signals and intent data. For example, if you're a recruitment consultancy, it's safe to assume that a company will be adding headcount when they announce that they've just secured Series A funding of £3mn. This is a signal, which can be used as a trigger for the consultancy to reach out and offer their services.

Similarly, people attending a webinar on how to find a job in IT are displaying a high degree of intent, and the recruitment agency could use the attendee list for a cold email campaign.

So to recap, **when** you reach out is just as important as **who** you reach out to.

🔎 List building (research): where and how

Now that you're clear on who you're targeting, it's time to build out your list of contacts. We advise against buying lists, as they are rarely qualified, seldom accurate and are the fastest way to burn your domain before you even get started.

Instead, build your own using sales prospecting tools and resources such as LinkedIn, Apollo, and Lusha. We use all of the above in conjunction with automation software such as Clay and PhantomBuster, code-free tools which save hours spent on repetitive tasks.

That said, it's worth taking the time to ensure that the quality of your list is as high as possible (rubbish in = rubbish out). 6/10 data rarely produces 10/10 results.

We use Google Sheets to store our list and capture the following information:

- *Company name*
- *Contact name*
- *Job title*
- *Email address*
- *LinkedIn URL*
- *Company website.*
- *Company address*
- *Phone number*
- *Mobile number*

📂 Data sourcing

Most information is relatively straightforward to find with the exception of emails and especially mobile numbers. We upload a .csv file and set up a waterfall in Clay which will access multiple providers such as Prospeo, Hunter, and others in order to find contact data.

What's great about Clay is that if you have accounts at any of these providers you can connect to them using your API key which means the search is "free". We also connect our ZeroBounce account, an email verification service with 99% accurate results.

✅ Data validation

Broadly speaking, email addresses will be listed as Valid, Invalid or Catch-All/Risky (ZeroBounce have an in-depth article covering all of the various status codes).

We only want to use email addresses that are marked as Valid. “Catch-all” means that the email address could be valid or invalid - the only way to check is to send a real email and see whether it bounces. “A bounce” means that the email failed to be delivered, and that’s a red flag for ESPs that can seriously hurt your domain reputation.

There are services out there that will take your Catch-All’s and attempt to “scrub” them by sending test emails and seeing if they bounce or not. We tested a couple of these providers and found they were only about 50% accurate. We’ll give them another go when their tech improves, but for now it’s just not worth it for us.

📝 Email copy: structure and personalisation

Now that we've built our list of prospects with validated and verified contact information, it's time to craft copy that will get us one step closer to winning new business.

Remember, nobody cares about your amazing product or service (yet!), especially when you're interrupting their day. Speak to their pain points, challenges and problems and how you can help them, and you'll see much better results.

The sweet spot for cold emails is ~100 words. Here is a sample structure you can follow:

- ***Custom subject line:*** *The goal is to grab attention and compel to open the email. Personalisation significantly helps open rates. Keep it short, casual, and boring.*
- ***Relevant personalisation:*** *Ideally unique for every prospect. Shows that you've put in the effort and value the prospect's time.*
- ***Their challenge/pain point:*** *Link what you do to the pain/challenge they face.*
- ***Why they should choose you:*** *One sentence which offers a high level overview of what you offer and how you can do it for them + relevant social proof.*
- ***Soft CTA:*** *At this stage we want to gauge interest without going straight in with a hard ask. The goal of a cold email is to start a conversation, not to make a sale. Don't pitch for marriage on the first date.*

💡 Email copy: additional tips

- *Stay clear of spammy words:* The list of words and phrases that are deemed to be spammy is growing every week (free, buy now, limited time offer, etc). Be sure to use a checker such as Folderly to identify and remove possible spam trigger words.

- *Use spintax:* Spintax is a way of rotating alternative words and phrases into an email, e.g. Hi/Hello/Hey. This helps to circumvent spam filters.

- *Use variables:* First name, company name, relevant personalisation, PS note, etc. This helps improve both deliverability and engagement.

- *Avoid attachments, links and HTML:* Avoid links, images and attachments in the first email you send. Just go plain text - this is your best bet for optimal deliverability. Stay clear of HTML in your emails at all times as it could be viewed as malicious.

- *Try personalised video as part of your email sequence:* Sendspark has developed a nifty method for producing dynamic videos that displays every prospect's website.

- *Legal compliance:* Be sure to include a process for people to unsubscribe from receiving your emails. It's a legal obligation under both GDPR and CAN-SPAM, and failure to comply can result in pretty hefty fines.

- *Follow up:* Don't make the mistake of not following up! We recommend using a 3-4 email sequence + additional touchpoints on other channels such as LinkedIn and phone. Focus on adding value each time you reach out.

- *A/B test:* Subject lines, copy, sending times.

⚙️ Email automation tool

Manually sending hundreds of emails is painful, repetitive and leaves you open to human error which is why we use an email automation platform.

Cold email software is a tool that helps you reach out to leads at scale. This type of software is particularly useful as it allows you to easily send out a large number of personalised emails without hurting domain reputation or landing in the spam box.

There are dozens of platforms available, we use Quickmail and whilst it's not perfect, it competently performs the tasks that we require. Be sure to thoroughly research your options and choose the best one for your specific needs.

🚀 Campaign launch!

Before we launch there’s one last check we need to perform and we use Mail-tester for it. Mail-tester will analyse your message, your mail server, your sending IP, and show you a detailed report of what's configured properly and what's not. It’s free, easy to use and absolutely vital.

Turn off open and click tracking as these are never 100% accurate and having them turned on will signal that it’s probably a cold email. Just focus on deliverability, positive reply rate and calls booked as your key metrics.

We usually start by sending 1-2 emails per inbox per day, and gradually increase the sending volume to build a positive sender reputation. Sending too many emails too quickly can flag your account as spam. Be patient.

Keep sending limits below 20 emails per inbox per day. If you wish to scale the volume, it is best to add new mailboxes rather than sending more per mailbox.

And you’re away!

💬 Final notes

Prioritise relevance (when and who you reach out to), deliverability, and, most importantly, consistency. The thing about sales is, the tap doesn't turn on right away. It takes consistent effort. And the best time to do it is before you need it!

With time, patience and sufficient in-house resources you can absolutely manage this yourself. Alternatively, if you don't have the time or tools to undertake this challenge, outsourcing this function may be your best bet; send us a message and let's have a chat!

Disclaimer: We don't have affiliations with any of the tools mentioned in this guide.

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Happy selling!