

# 67 **Captivating Email Topics and Ideas that Convert Readers Into Buyers (or Donors)**

A cheat sheet to write emails that get clicked, read, and shared  
— and that bring in the dough

By:



# 67 Captivating Email Topics and Ideas that Convert Readers into Buyers (or Donors)

By Mandy O'Neill

The hardest part of email marketing is coming up with ideas and writing them.

Am I right?

There's this "mental ramp" that you go through just to get into writing mode.

Does your "mental ramp" involve cleaning the garage, walking the dog, doing four loads of laundry, surfing Facebook, and watching YouTube videos of dogs being rescued and finding new forever homes? Awwww.

Then it happens...

30 minutes before you need to hit "send," you make a mad dash to cut and paste email copy that you're pulling from God-knows-where, to patch together a less than stellar email to some of your most highly valued readers.

{Cringe}

Then you cross your fingers and hope for the best — that your email gets click-throughs to your landing page, or sales, or donations...

When the email flops, you dread writing the next email even more.

I know this experience well because I, uh, have a "friend" who tells me this is what she goes through.

Writing good emails is hard.

Writing emails that actually convert is even harder.

It can be torture.

**67 Captivating Email Topics and Ideas that Convert Readers Into Buyers (or Donors)** is designed to end your torture.

I'll admit it: The topics that follow aren't rocket science.

**But, they are based on email campaigns that are working** in today's cluttered email inboxes.

So, stop cleaning the garage and use these email campaign ideas to design an email marketing campaign your readers will love to read!

And click-through.

## The days of one-off email blasts are over

When someone tells me "I just don't know what to say in an email," I know part of their writer's block really stems from trying to accomplish too much with one email.

When someone trusts you with their email address, it's unlikely they are asking you to just keep throwing pitches at them to see what sticks.

Curve balls work in baseball, not email marketing.

High performing email lists act more like an ongoing conversation with your best client, customer, or donor, where trust is built over time with consistent high-value messaging.

It's kind of like movie franchises. Each movie in the Harry Potter franchise has to stand on its own, but also fit into the context of a larger story.

The same is true with email marketing. Each email must stand on its own single topic and call to action, but also fit into the larger context of your brand and relationship with your reader.

**One more thing....**

Only send an email when you're delivering value to your reader.

By value, I mean "benefit," not features.

Are you saving them money, helping them look good to their kids, fixing an embarrassing problem, or saving their neck? If so, hit "send."

Even if you're a nonprofit organization, benefits to the reader still apply to your email campaign, as you'll see in some of the ideas I give you in the list that follows.

The value you offer your reader should be clear, whether it's to help them be the person they want to show up in the world as, to remember their mom by making a donation, to help preserve open space so their kids can continue to play without traffic, or to give them a soundbite they can use at tonight's cocktail party to sound smart.

All my best,

Mandy O'Neill

The following list is intended to inspire you and get your creative juices going, to help you customize your own email campaign.

These topics are pulled from proven, high-performing email campaigns working today, so feel free to grab the title and adapt it for your own use, or even swipe it "as is" if the shoe fits.

The more you practice writing emails, the easier it gets and the better you get at it too. Until then...here you go...

## Table of Contents

Welcome and conversion email campaigns.....	5
Lead Nurturing Campaign .....	7
Goodwill emails –newsletters, updates .....	8
Product Launch or Sales Campaign.....	10
Donor Appeal Campaign.....	11
Transactional emails.....	13
Reactivation or "Win Back" Campaigns.....	14
Email Marketing Automation.....	17
What's Next? .....	18

## Welcome and conversion email campaigns

The most important email you ever send is your "welcome" or conversion email, for two reasons:

1. The first email a new subscriber receives from you gets the highest open rate of just about any email you'll ever send — 58%, on average. The next emails drop to

the 30% - 40% open rate and usually keep dropping from there, eventually into the 20s or teens.

2. New leads go cold in about 14 days, so you need to convert people quickly.

Welcome emails are like when you're first dating: Go all out to impress with your top stuff until you've got them hooked.

Studies show that welcome emails that arrive immediately in your readers' inbox get opened, and clicked-through, at a higher percentage rate, so take the time to set up your auto-responder.

Sending this first email trains your reader to open your emails and socializes them to this new email relationship with you.

## Examples

- **Welcome to the family!** — This message conveys that you're part of the "in" crowd now and we've got your back.
- **What's next? — Tell your reader what to expect.** It could be daily deals. It could be a weekly blog post, plus a few members-only promotions. Describe the benefit versus the feature, i.e., instead of, "You'll get a weekly email with my blog post," you might write, "Save time with my email marketing tips delivered right to your inbox every Friday."
- **Welcome [First Name]** — Make your new subscriber feel like a million bucks and that they are "in the right place." Gush a little over them. It's fine. Make your reader feel understood, affirmed, validated, and appreciated.
- **Two questions** — Find out what really motivated your reader to first subscribe so you know how to segment future emails. Examples: What's your biggest struggle with [your topic]? Why did you first donate to this organization? What would rock your world if you could [related to your product, service, mission]? Hint: Don't use a survey to ask these questions. Be conversational and just say "hit reply and let me know." It's worth getting this information via your inbox if someone is taking the time to tell you.

- **You're one of us now!** — This type of email conveys that the reader is right where he belongs — among the "in" crowd. Still tell your reader what to expect when you send this type of message.
- **Here's the link to your [lead magnet or opt-in freebie]** — Here you convey that you're delivering on a promise and can be trusted.

## Lead Nurturing Campaign

I like to call this the "trust-building" campaign. This is where you've got the lead and you want to turn them into a prospect, customer, client, volunteer, or donor.

I recommend that you send this series of emails over a 7-14 day period, starting immediately after your subscriber lead comes in.

Leads that aren't converted in 30 days go really "cold."

The highest performing lead nurturing campaigns share your most valuable content.

Yep. You heard me.

Give away your top three (3) activities / products / discounts / secret tips that get super-fast results — and you will gain the trust you need to convert this new lead at a higher rate than ever before.

Once you've shared high value content, you've earned the right to make an initial sale or donation pitch by the third or fourth email in this series.

### Examples

- **The easiest way to [anything]**
- **Top tools for [your service, product, or mission]** — curated lists are wildly popular

- **The one thing to avoid when you're [       ]**
- **The 4 Hour Solution to [anything]**
- **By the way...**
- **The ONE WORD secret to my success is...**
- **Skip business school, here's how it really works...**
- **Our buyers' recommendations for summer essentials**
- **Which one drives more leads? Facebook, YouTube, or Instagram?**
- **How to choose the right [service, product, or mission]**
- **Free online training: [service, product, or mission]**

## Goodwill emails –newsletters, updates

Goodwill emails are all about providing value and brand loyalty.

Ideally, you send these emails on a regular basis, whether it's daily, weekly, or monthly, and with a few seasonal extras thrown in.

Because you've established trust with consistent high-value emails, you've earned the right to sales promotions, product launches, or donor appeals, in addition to this regular email communication.

Blog broadcasts are great Goodwill emails because your blog is consistent and high quality.

You can either drive traffic to your blog with a well written hook and cliff-hanger to drive traffic back to your website to read the full post.

Or, you can deliver the content in its entirety in your email.

Test both models and go with the one your audience likes best, or that best serves your business model.

## Examples

- **Breaking news** — If you're going to use the words "breaking news," make sure it is, in fact, breaking news to your reader, not just hype
- **You won't believe...** — Disrupt your readers' thinking by revealing a surprising or counter-intuitive fact meant to inspire a change in belief or behavior
- **67 Captivating Email Topics** — you can never go wrong with curated **lists** of your favorite tools or best places or best restaurants, or "top" anything
- **I couldn't have been more wrong** — Usually, this email is designed to create a change in mindset or behavior, a catalyst for change, such as: "I had a close call because I thought I could check one text while driving. Never again." Help your reader see something from a different point of view by sharing your initial bias and why that changed
- **100 Life Hacks That Make Life Easier** — The "lifeline" is how you identify an obstacle and offer a quick fix. This is a perfect extension of the top 3 problems you solve for your clients or customers. Use the top 3 questions you always get, even if they are dumb questions that drive you crazy
- **I've got you covered: your guide to Facebook's crazy latest changes** — I call this "comfort-email." When you're getting a bunch of traffic questions about something confusing, proactively send out an email that "holds their hand" through change. Your reader will love you as if you just gave them a big bowl of creamy mac and cheese
- **How to create an email campaign rather than a single email** — Send your readers "strategies" for how to hit their goals quickly, with less cost and less

pain. Your audience will love you putting their challenge into a proven framework or context, not just a next step

- **Daily Digest** — Create a summary of breaking news, like theSkimm.com. Digests are as popular as "tools" posts in that you're creating value by curating content for your reader
- **Happy Birthday!** — You can never go wrong wishing someone a happy birthday

Want more ideas?

Here are two insanely good resources for blog ideas, from Jon Morrow, one of my trusted online mentors: [Headline Hacks](#) and [The Only 6 Posts Worth Writing \(and How to Totally Nail Each One\)](#).

## Product Launch or Sales Campaign

This type of email marketing campaign is used to create awareness, educate, or sell a product or service.

If you're selling products or services, you might even create a sales funnel with emails customized to people who open the first email.

If you're a retail shop, this email can be your new line, your latest promotion, or a flash sale.

Outside of retail, it's always a good idea to prime the pump of any product launch or sales campaign with some related content in advance of your launch, published via your Goodwill emails.

Be sure to use authentic urgency or scarcity to drive immediate action.

And, have a killer landing page that your reader clicks to from the email. With sales campaigns, the sole goal of your email is to get the reader to your landing page.

## Examples

- **Early bird discount**
- **You've got questions, I've got answers** — Send this email to people who opened your promotional emails but didn't buy yet. If your business or nonprofit is able to use marketing automation tools, such as ActiveCampaign, Infusionsoft, or Hubspot, then you'll be able to trigger emails in your sales sequence based on behavior and interest tags.
- **Price is going up at midnight** — Urgency is a direct marketer's best friend.
- **Closing in 29 hours** — I once got a 79% open rate using this subject line, mostly, I think, because 29 is an odd number compared to the usual 24, 48, or 72 hours.
- **Closing at 12:00 midnight tonight** — Studies show that actual hours convert better than "tomorrow" or "Friday"
- **You've got till midnight tonight**
- **Closing at 4 pm ET today**
- **Going, going...** — Give one last chance to buy before the doors close, the sale is over, or you're sold out.
- **Going, going, gone** — This is the other side of the coin of buyer's remorse. You missed out on a good deal and I bet you don't miss it the next time I offer it.

## Donor Appeal Campaign

Notice the ideas are almost all focused on the donor's role in your mission. Not their money, but what their involvement in your nonprofit says about them to the world.

## Examples

- **Big news you don't want to miss** - this plays on Fear of Missing Out, which is a powerful motivator

- **Be part of this historic moment** – this plays on Fear of Missing Out, which is a powerful motivator
- **Be an elephant champion** – you are champion already, we're helping you prove it
- **You are not alone** – all the cool people are doing this
- **It's part of who you are** – how do you want to be seen in this world?
- **You're invited to [help us save tigers]**
- **Watch what we did together** – feedback that validates the “theory of change, e.g. we *can* fix this is critical to all your appeal campaigns
- **Here's how we won this together** – your reader/donor is the hero here
- **You are vital to protecting [Colorado's wildlife]** - personalizing by geographic location is performing extremely well
- **You need to see this video** – cliffhanger subject line lets you introduce your appeal campaign via video, which is performing extremely well for conversions
- **This could be a good fit for you**
- **How are you celebrating [Veterans Day]?**
- **Have you ever been [scared, bullied, relieved]?**
- **[Tigers] are in a race for time, can you help?** – urgency can be about your mission, not just the typical campaign deadline
- **3 Days, 1 Gift, 2X the impact**

- **[First name], your gift doubles today** - matching gifts campaigns are the "BOGO" of the nonprofit world and boost conversions

## Transactional Emails

The harsh reality is that 60% to 70% of your buyers abandon their cart before buying.

Let that one sink in.

You can cut into that number significantly with a shopping cart abandonment strategy.

Granted, it takes some setting up on the back end, so it's not for beginning email marketers, but definitely put this strategy on your "to-do" list.

When you combine a shopping cart abandonment email series with a retargeted Facebook ad campaign to the same audience, you boost sales with little effort because the whole system is automated.

About 50% of the people you send an abandonment email to will open your email and 1/3 of those will go ahead and buy.

Also, be sure to trigger a dedicated welcome series customized to a first time buyer or donor, modeled after the welcome series described above. Gush and make them feel welcome. Tell them what to expect. If it's a big online purchase, be sure to rave about what they just bought to help overcome any buyer's remorse that might set in.

### Examples

- **Thank you for your order!** — If your system allows customization of this email, change the template from the standard "Order confirmation." Add a sentence, or an additional testimonial that bump "buyer's pride" about the product they just bought or the donation they just made
- **Your order is on its way** — shipping status

- **Your order has shipped** — shipping status
- **Smile, it's still on sale** — shopping cart abandonment
- **It's not too late** — shopping cart abandonment
- **Where'd you go?** — shopping cart abandonment
- **Complete your purchase** — shopping cart abandonment
- **People who bought ... were interested in ...** — only available if you are using marketing automation
- **Did we solve it?** — You know what drives me crazy? Post support emails that say “How’d we do” and then ask you to fill out a survey. Post support call surveys *should* still be about your reader, not asking how wonderful you are. I know they do this because they are measuring results, but if you word it better, I bet you get better survey results too
- **Are you good to go?** — post-support call email

## Reactivation or "Win Back" Campaigns

Everyone's email file has a segment that goes stale.

Especially if your email communication has been spotty till now.

Subscribers that haven't opened an email for six months or longer, or whatever time period you deem, are “stale.”

Here's a pretty decent idea of why your file has gone “stale”:

About 50% of your inactive email addresses “don't have time to read your emails,” which is code for “your emails aren't relevant to me.”

There. I said it.

About 30% will say they actually are reading your emails. Their opens just don't show on your data because plain text doesn't register as opened, or if images are disabled or cached, your email won't register as opened.

5% won't remember who you are or why they ever subscribed.

Reactivation campaigns are a great opportunity to re-engage a percentage of your subscribers that “don't have time.”

By the way, if people aren't opening or clicking emails, it's a good idea to stop emailing them anyway, as many email service providers use those metrics to determine whether to classify your message as spam.

Finally, bad email addresses skew your financial forecasts for email campaign performance, so get them out of your active file one way or another.

You don't have to delete the email addresses that fail to reactivate, but do stop emailing them.

Sending one email to try and woo your subscribers into action isn't enough.

Here's a game plan with some idea of what to expect (which is always the biggest question I get about reactivation campaigns):

Send two or three emails as part of your campaign over a seven day period. Expect an open rate of about 18% and a click-through of 10% - 12%. About 3% will immediately unsubscribe. Depending on your business or nonprofit, you can expect to "reactivate" 5% of your inactive names.

**BONUS TIP:** Run a targeted Facebook campaign to a custom audience of this targeted email list at the same time you run the campaign to boost your re-activation rates.

## Examples

- **Are we still good?** — I'd love to keep sending you [special deals, training videos, blog post] at least once a week. Click here to keep getting emails from me. I don't want to blow up your inbox with emails that aren't valuable, so just let me know if you'd like me to stop sending [special deals]. Either way, thanks for letting me know.
- **Did I offend you?** — How can we offer you better value in these emails? We don't want to clutter your inbox with emails that aren't relevant to you. Please click the link below to tell us how you feel about our emails.

If you want to stay on our list, you don't need to do anything. If you want to unsubscribe, please do it now by using the link below.

- \_\_\_ I do read your emails
- \_\_\_ I don't know who you are or why you email me
- \_\_\_ I don't have time to read your emails
- \_\_\_ There's a technical barrier to reading your emails
- \_\_\_ Your emails just don't interest me
- \_\_\_ You send me too many emails
- \_\_\_ Something else: \_\_\_\_\_

- **Do you want to renew your subscription to [your name]?**
- **Your subscription to [your name] will expire soon**
- **Last chance to stay up to date on [your product, mission]**
- **[First name], we want you back!**
- **\$25 off [product] until [deadline of 5 days or less]**
- **We miss you, [first name]**
- **[The fight against cancer] still needs you!**

- **Thanks and goodbye** — This is for when you've tried three or four messages and still get no response.

## Email Marketing Automation

Email marketing automation is a hot topic right now.

For good reason.

Email marketing is still king of online conversions.

If you want new prospects, customers, or donors, email marketing is central to your strategy. Period.

Email marketing converts better than other online channels except for organic search traffic.

AOL Platforms' latest analysis shows conversion rates to be 6% which is almost double the conversion rate for any other online channel.

### Conversion Rate by Marketing Channel:



*Source: AOL Platforms*

If you're just starting out, simple email marketing software with high-quality email campaigns are just fine.

But here's the deal.

As your business or nonprofit grows, being able to segment your emails by “interest” or “behavior” often called “tags” in automation software **significantly boosts your conversion rates.**

Email marketing automation gives you the tools to put all the campaigns we cover in this document into one system that would automatically trigger pre-written email campaigns to the people most likely to buy or donate... automatically.

Your subscribers love you because they are now only getting content or offers from you that they find interesting.

It's worth looking at in your overall game plan as more software becomes available, marketing automation is getting easier to implement.

## What's Next?

You rocked it if you got this far.

It isn't easy to write great emails, but choosing the right email campaign strategy and putting your email into context clears a major hurdle.

Keep practicing!

It gets easier the more you do it. And, you get better pretty quickly because you'll know what works and what doesn't.

Here's what you do next:

1. Ask yourself if your email is delivering value for your reader and if so, what exactly is that value?
2. Use that value to develop the benefit of the email and include that benefit in your email subject line, headline, and landing page — and emphasize it.
3. "The first draft of anything is shit," says Ernest Hemingway, so just write. Sit and write what's on your brain as if you were actually talking to your best buddy about the

topic. I write in Evernote. If you use a tablet, Word, whatever, just write and save it. The point is, be conversational.

4. Whatever you do, don't self-edit the first version. That's my mistake. You'll edit, someone else will edit, you'll tweak it as it's uploaded and tested, so the important part is to just write to one person in a conversational tone.

5. Ask yourself if you would find this email interesting enough to share with anyone outside of this email. If the answer is "yes," then you've got an interesting enough email to hit the send button. If the answer is "no," rewrite, change your offer, or don't send it.

6. If you have a call-to-action (CTA) in your email, do you have accompanying urgency or scarcity to bump conversions? CTAs are limp noodles without urgency or scarcity to fire up your reader.

If you've got all this, you did it!

You have **a captivating email marketing campaign that will convert readers into buyers or donors.**

Yours,

Mandy O'Neill

P.S. See, your garage didn't need cleaning anyway.