Cold Email Hacks

Most founders and salespeople want to get their hands on the perfect cold email template. They think it's like the Holy Grail or the Fountain of Youth—a mystical object that will magically solve all of their (lead generation) problems.

Taking a template, filling in the blanks and hitting send is easy. It even feels like you accomplished something important. But that's not how you grow your business.

You grow your business by developing a solid process. Or even better, quickly copying a process that works, and improving on it over time. This guide you're reading right now is a quick start guide to getting your cold email process together the right way.

But first …

What do you want to achieve with cold emails?

The goal of your cold emails should be *a) to set up a meeting/call* or *b) to get referred to the right person*. It's an opening so that people expect (and want) to talk with you.

Cold emails are the fastest way to reach the decision maker within an organization without a pre-existing relationship.

Who is receiving your email? Your perfect customer

How do you find the perfect customer? The very first step is to have a clearly defined customer profile. The more specific, the better because then you'll be able to speak their language, which can drastically improve response rates.

Too many companies spread themselves out too thin. They send too many emails to too many different companies in too many different industries—and then they fail to generate consistent results, and never have reliable data to improve their processes on.

It's a lot better to focus on a tiny niche first, and then move on to the next vertical afterwards, then to target two (or more) verticals at the same time. I can't drive this point home enough: *fewer but higher quality leads will almost always lead to more success!*

Focusing on a small niche allows you to:
- Address their wants and needs with much higher precision
- Word your emails in a way that speaks to them in their own language
- Do things the way they do things, so that your selling process matches their buying process.

This isn't a guide about creating ideal customer profiles, but here's a post I wrote on [How to create your ideal customer profile for B2B lead generation](#).

If you need help with this, just send me an email (you'll find my email address at the end of this guide).

Where to find email addresses?

There are four basic ways to get email addresses.

Highest quantity/lowest quality: Buying lists

If you buy from these providers, expect a certain percentage of that data to be outdated. (It's been a couple of years since I last used any of these companies, but back then about 30%–40% of the data I bought was outdated.)

This will cost you twice: once the money you spend acquiring the bad data, and then the money (time/resources) you invest in reaching out to those unqualified leads.

High quantity/low quality: Web scraping

An alternative to buying lists is to make your own list by scraping websites, which means you extract contact data from a website with a little program/script.

It's a bit of a gray area, and you should check if the website you want to scrape allows that.

If you target a very specific niche and there are highly targeted websites, this can be a successful approach.

Low quantity/high quality: Outsourced lead gen team

Hire a company that manually finds leads for you, based on the criteria you establish with them.

Lowest quantity/highest quality: Create Customer Profiles

Look at your current five most successful customers. Successful in this context means a) they get the most value out of using your product and b) you profit greatly from them being a customer. (Look for the strongest win-wins between you and your customers.)

And then try to identify the core DNA of your most successful customers. Ask a lot of questions about these companies and look for common denominators:
- How big is the company?
- How many employees do they have?
- What other software tools do they use?
- What are the titles of all the employees?
- What kind of social media platforms do they use?
- Where are they located?
- What's their average deal size?
- How long have they already been in business?
- How did they hear about us?
- How did we acquire them?
- Etc.

You'll have to ask a ton of questions and then filter out the answers that they have in common and that are most relevant.

Based on that, you'll create a very specific customer profile.

And then you'll go and find another 5–20 businesses that have the same core DNA (sometimes you can start with their closest competitors ;)).

You don't need thousands of shitty names. You just need a handful of really great ones.

Reach out to them and strive to create high-quality sales conversations. Try to maximize response and conversion rates. Gain deep market insights that you can then leverage to make more sales and close better deals.

Reaching decision makers within large organizations

If you're going after a decision maker at a big organization or company, send an email to three or four people ABOVE them in the hierarchy.

DON'T CC, and don't send all the emails at once! Send individual emails to each person (although you can use the same basic template).

You're asking the higher-ups for a referral down. At some point, one of the higher-ups will FORWARD your email to the right person in their organization.

Test, measure, optimize your emails

Always measure the open rates and response rates of your emails. That's the only way to figure out what truly works for your target audience.

The best practices and optimized templates I share with you here are just a starting point for you (and the same is true for any kind of sales advice you'll find anywhere). It's your job to implement these and then run experiments to see if you can create something that generates better results in your market.

(Our sales communication platform Close.io keeps track of all your email communication and has powerful reporting and analytics features that allow you to show open and response rates for all of your templates. What's more, you can even see who opened your emails within the last hour/day/week/etc.—so you can reach out to people when you're on top of their mind.)

Things to keep track of:

- What's your open rate? (You should expect a +35% open rate.)
- What's your response rate? (You should expect a 10% response rate. This includes positive, negative and neutral responses, but not undeliverable notifications.)
- What kind of position/title responds to your emails? Sometimes a response from a top-level exec is worth more than three responses from a low-level employee.

- How do responses convert into qualified leads?
- Do not include undeliverable emails in your stats! (If you send out 300 emails and get 100 undeliverable messages, use 200 for your calculations. If 20 people respond, you'll calculate that as a 10% response rate.)

ONE goal (not two, three, or more)

Every email should have ONE goal. Don't overwhelm people with choices.

You want to make it super easy for them to respond, and you want to make it very clear to them what they should do as a next step.

Examples:
- *Click this link...*
- *If you're the appropriate person to speak with, what does your calendar look like? If not, who do you recommend I talk to?* (This particular sentence is from Brian Kreuzberger, who has tested tens of thousands of cold emails. He found that the word "calendar" gets a 35% higher response than the word "schedule", and the word "talk" gets a 60% increase in response over the word "meet" or "call".)
- *Please refer me to the person responsible for media buying.*
- (See our templates for more examples.)

Your goal should be to either a) get referred to the right person or b) set up a call/meeting. It should not be both!

How many cold emails should you send per day?

Between 10 to 100 cold emails per day. If you get a 10% response rate, then you'll have 1 to 10 responses per day, which is a good start for a sales rep. You'll get better results by focusing on quality rather than quantity.

When to send cold emails?

Tuesday to Thursday are usually the best days to send emails. Mondays are worst (We all know how everybody who works for a company feels about Mondays). Fridays are second worst. Sundays are worth testing!

Again, these are general truths that prove correct for 90% of companies, but try out Mondays and Fridays as well, maybe you'll make them work.

Smartphone-friendly emails

Make your emails so short that they can easily be read on a smartphone. This means first and foremost: keep it short and succinct.

Make it (look) personal

Even though you're using templates, your emails should look personal. Avoid fancy HTML designs. Your email should appear to be a real email, written and sent by a real person.

It should not look like a beautifully designed, professional, corporate marketing email. Anything that has the look and feel of a "one to many" communication will significantly lower open and response rates.

How to respond to responses

Once you get a response, how do you respond? The most important thing here is to KEEP USING A SYSTEM! Don't randomly craft responses for every email.

There's a limited number of responses you'll get anyway:
- Positive (set up call/meeting)
- Not interested
- Not interested right now
- Send me more information
- We're already working with someone
- I told the right person about you, and they'll get back to you if they're interested
- Out of office notifications (which often contain the contact data of who to best reach out to!)

You want to have templates in place for how you respond. You also want to measure the results you get from these templates, and continually tweak and optimize for what works best.

Sometimes the best way to respond to positive replies is by picking up the phone and calling within 5 minutes of being sent a response.

Referral emails: How to handle referrals

Let's say you asked for a referral to the right person. Mary Michaels tells you, "John Smith from media buying is the person you want to talk to." You have one of two options:
1. Email John Smith from media and CC the original referrer.
2. Email John Smith and write, "Mary Michaels from Advertising told me to talk with you."

How to follow up with non-responders

If you get no response at all, simply hit reply on the original email (so that it's quoted in the email) and write:

Hi {{contact.first_name}},

Just following up, does it make sense to talk about this? If not, who would be the right person to talk to?

Thanks,
{{user.first_name}}

How do you decide whom you should follow up with and when you should follow up? My favorite tool is Close.io's follow-up feature. If you don't get a reply to your email by a certain date, you'll receive a reminder to follow up.

On average, follow up one to three times.

Separate prospecting and selling

Ideally, you don't want to let account execs/sales reps prospect. You should have someone who is dedicated to do that, so sales reps can focus on what they do best: selling.

Sales Development Reps are the ones who should reach out into cold or inactive companies. They should send the cold emails, and pass them on to sales reps/account execs once there's a certain level of qualification. You can often see huge productivity gains when you hire someone who is dedicated only to prospecting, and let your sales reps focus on working on your leads.

If you don't want to hire a Sales Development Rep, it's best to let your sales reps work in dedicated time blocks, e.g. set aside a certain number of hours ONLY for prospecting, and a certain number of hours ONLY for selling.

Recommended further reading: http://www.forentrepreneurs.com/predictable-revenue/

Subject line sorcery

This is the most important part of your email. Even though it's just a couple of words, you should dedicate as much attention and care to your subject line as you do to your body copy. If your subject line doesn't propel the recipient to open the email, then the body copy of the email doesn't matter.

When it comes to subject lines, follow these guidelines:
- Use their name in the subject line when it makes sense.
- Make the subject line as specific as possible—the more personal the subject line, the higher the open rate.
- If you wonder if it sounds too much like a "marketing email", then it does sound too much like a marketing email :).
- Experiment with questions in subject lines.

Here are 4 cold email subject lines that get open rates of +35%:
1. "Introduction: {Name}" or "Introduction {your name/company} <> {their name/company}"
2. "quick request"
3. "Trying to connect"
4. "{Name of their company}"

Deliver in your email what you promise in your subject line. If the disconnect is too big, you're going to get good open rates but bad responses.

There are ways to improve your open rates by using certain subject line hacks. Some subject lines are a bit misleading, but highly effective in getting your emails opened. One that is already a bit old and overused by spammers by now (but worked great before) was to just use "Re: " as a subject line, making it appear as if this was a response to a previous email exchange.

Subject lines like "Bad news" or "Strange question" also often get great open rates. However, these kinds of tactics can backfire. If the first impression you make on a prospect is that you "tricked" them into opening an email … ask yourself if that's the right way to build trust in a relationship. This is a choice you have to make for yourself, and what you think is adequate for your own business.

Cold email body wording

Using the right words in your cold emails is an art form in itself. The templates included here are tried and tested. They consistently deliver great results in many different industries and different sized companies. Yet, how exactly you fill in the blanks—your "one sentence pitch" or "unique benefit"—can make a huge difference in the responses you get.

Again, this ties back into creating a clear perfect customer profile, and understanding how to speak to them, and it's beyond the scope of this guide to break this down.

Cold email templates

Every company, of course, is different but the cold email templates and best practices below should be a good starting point for most of you.

There are 2 approaches to cold emails used today:
1. You're emailing someone high up in the organization, asking for a referral down to the right person (aka Cold Calling 2.0).
2. You're emailing the decision maker directly, pitching them to sign up/call/meet/etc.

Let's get started with four cold email templates asking for referrals within the organization. Then, two cold email templates for directly pitching decision makers.

Note: These emails are Close.io-ready so if you're a Close.io user, you can copy and paste them directly into Close.io as templates.

Cold email: Referral V1

Hi {{contact.first_name}},

My name is {{user.first_name}} and I head up business development efforts with {{organization.name}}. We recently launched a new platform that [one sentence pitch].

I am taking an educated stab in the dark here. However, based on your online profile, you appear to be an appropriate person to connect with... or might at least point me in the right direction.

I'd like to speak with someone from {{lead.name}} who is responsible for [handling something that's relevant to my product].

If that's you, are you open to a fifteen-minute call on [time and date] to discuss ways the {{organization.name}} platform can specifically help your business? If not you, can you please put me in touch with the right person?

I appreciate the help!

Best,
{{user.first_name}}

Cold email: Referral V2

Hi {{contact.first_name}},

I hope I'm not bothering you. Could you please refer me to the person in charge of [something that's relevant to your product]?

Thanks for your time,
{{user.first_name}}

Cold email: Referral V3

Hey {{contact.first_name}},

My name is {{user.first_name}} and I'm with {{organization.name}}. We work with organizations like {{lead.name}} to [one sentence pitch].

[One sentence unique benefit].

Could you direct me to the right person to talk to about this at {{lead.name}} so we can explore if this would be something valuable to incorporate into your events?

Cheers,
{{user.first_name}}

Subject: Can you point me in the right direction?

Hey {{contact.first_name}},

I'm sorry to trouble you. Would you be so kind as to tell me who is responsible for [insert your biggest pain point here that resonates with your ideal customer OR insert function like "sales" or "recruiting"] and how I might get in touch with them?

Thank you,
{{user.first_name}}

(This referral cold email is a template directly from the [team at Predictable Revenue](#).)

Here are 2 cold emails that use approach #2, and pitch the decision maker directly on the value proposition and next action steps.

Cold email: Selling V1

Hey {{contact.first_name}},

I hope this email finds you well! I wanted to reach out because [explain how you got their contact information and how you relate to them: talked to a colleague, saw their company online, etc.].

{{organization.name}} has a new platform that will help [their team] at {{lead.name}}. [One sentence pitch of benefits.] We do this by:
- Benefit/Feature 1
- Benefit/Feature 2
- Benefit/Feature 3 [(optional)]

Let's explore how {{organization.name}} can specifically help your business. Are you available for a quick call [time and date]?

Cheers,
{{user.first_name}}

Cold email: Selling V2

Hey {{contact.first_name}},

I hope this email finds you well! I wanted to reach out because [explain how you got their contact information and how you relate to them: talked to a colleague, saw their company online, etc.].

{{organization.name}} has a new platform that will help [their team] at {{lead.name}}. [One sentence pitch of benefits.]
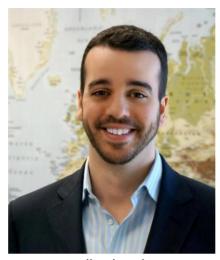
I know that {{organization.name}} will be able to help {{lead.name}} [insert high-level benefit].

Are you available for a quick call [time and date]?

Cheers,
{{user.first_name}}

Questions, comments?

Hope you found these cold email hacks useful. Please let me know what you think about this course—any comments and questions welcome. Just send me an email. I look forward to hearing from you!

steli@close.io

Want to learn more about startup sales?

If you want to learn more about startup sales, you can claim your free startup sales course here:

https://close.io/free-sales-course/

What founders & sales pros say about our course:

"Steli's a great teacher. After reading his posts, we switched from an enquiry form to a self sign-up with 7-day trial period--our potential customers used the app more proactively and upgraded more frequently."
– Richard Burton, Co-founder, Sourcing.io

"I don't think I've ever been so engaged with a mailing list / content marketing before. Good stuff, and I can't wait to get more :D"
– James Gill, CEO & Co-founder, GoSquared

"This sales course is one of the few courses I am excited to read. Learning how to sell is a major problem for many startups, and this course is hands-down one of the best intros to selling I've seen in a long time."
– Luke Thomas, Growth Engineer, YesGraph

"Great email series! Especially the follow-up hustle lesson is super valuable for sales professionals."
– Garrett Clark, Account Executive, KnowledgeTree Inc.

"Love this series! Excellent content. :)"
– Andy Josuweit, CEO & Co-founder, Student Loan Hero

"Expected this to be the same Internet sales BS I get from most CRM providers who focus on describing my problems and stop there. As a novice I really appreciate the step by step. Helps reduce apprehension and provides a starting point."
– Suraj Srinivas, Vetica

"Love your content."
– James Dougal, Chief Marketing Officer, GrowthForce

"Great start to the program! Already printed and on the wall for review."
– Jon Wellman, CEO & Co-founder, yellloh.com

"I thought the content in the course was really helpful. It covered a range of topics, and highlighted what's important for a growing company trying to improve its sales practices."
– Brett Robbins, Head of Business Development, Custora

Sign up here → https://close.io/free-sales-course/

Want to buy my book on outbound sales?

I recently (July 2014) published a book on outbound sales for startups. As a sign of appreciation for your dedication to mastering cold emails, I want to give you a little promo code. If you use it, you'll get the whole book for half the price:

awesomesauce

Just use this code when entering your credit card number on the checkout page.
http://www.StartupSalesGuide.com

Want to find out how many more deals you can close?

Our sales software helps sales pros make more sales and close more deals from day one. If you're managing a sales pipeline of more than 100 leads per year and use email and the phone to sell, you definitely want to try out Close.io.

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