

How to get journalists to **open, click, and love** your email pitch

Original research from
Agility PR Solutions



Journalists get a dizzying number of email pitches.

[One 2017 report](#) found that nearly half of all journalists worldwide receive more than 25 email pitches *a day*, while producing fewer than 25 pieces *a month*.

The math just doesn't add up. The odds of getting your pitch noticed and picked up are stacked against you. Getting your message out to the masses isn't an uphill battle, it's an uphill war.

This guide is going to help you win that war.

Here's how.

[Our media database](#) includes a distribution tool, meaning after you find your ideal influencers and add them to your media list, you can fire off emails to them from right inside the platform. One offshoot of this is that a lot of emails get sent through our platform.

A lot.

Like an average of 103,613 every weekday.

So, we did what any self-respecting database provider would do: we took a good look at the numbers, found the distributions that had performed exceptionally, and approached those companies and agencies that earned the highest open rates and clickthrough rates to find out how they did it.

What you have here is the evidence you need to change the way you do email pitching. When all is said and done, and you flip the last page of this guide, you'll have the knowledge it takes to stand out in the crowd and get your emails opened and engaged with by journalists. What we're saying is, you'll basically be invincible.



SECTION 1: EMAILS WITH TOP OPEN RATES



After identifying those email distributions with the highest open rates, we dug into why, looking for both general email best practices as well as any patterns specific to PR emails.

This is what we analyzed:

- 1 Length and nature of the subject line
- 2 Whether the *from* address was a personal or a general one, eg. info@abccorp.com
- 3 The day and time at which it was sent
- 4 The number of recipients

What you're about to read may shock and disturb you. But it's much more likely to be nice and enlightening.

We found that the distributions with the highest open rates, had much in common. For example, without fail, they were always sent from a personal email account. There's something warming about receiving an email from a real person rather than a general "info@" account. And it seems journalists would agree.

We took the emails with the highest open rates, analyzed and pored over them, and came to a few other conclusions too. Here are...

4 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR OPEN RATES

1 There is a subject line sweet spot. Subject lines ranged from 136 characters at the high end all the way down to 29 at the low. And get this: nearly 60% of the distributions that made this list contained something along the lines of “Follow-up” or “Re:” or “Additional info” in the subject line, leading us wily analysts to theorize that maybe, just maybe, **the secret to earning astronomical open rates is to send a second email for every pitch.**

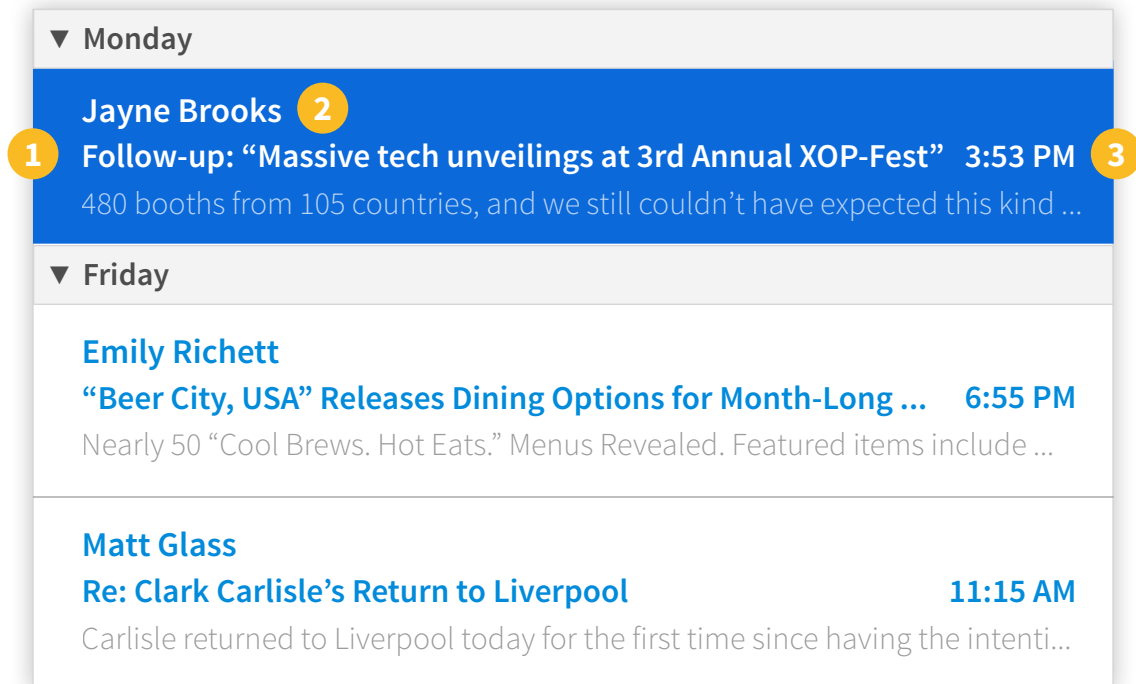
Aim for a subject line of 60-75 characters, and, when it makes sense, include a reference to a previous distribution.

2 The *from* address was personal. Always personal.

Don't you dare send it from a general email account!

3 The days of delivery varied — as would be expected — but one in particular shone above the rest: Monday. As for time of day, it's all about mid-afternoon.

If good open rates are what you're after (and let's face it, who isn't?), send your distribution at 3:53 in the afternoon on a Monday.



4 We found there was no clear answer when it comes to the optimal number of recipients, but we did notice that larger media lists had lower open rates but greater potential for total number of pickups. The distributions with the highest rates, on the other hand, were those that targeted very few journalists. Makes sense, right?

This is personal and depends on the type of news you're pitching. If it's niche, a smaller list would be best. Huge breaking general news? Go big.

PRO TIP

1

Tidy lists and keeping it concise

The first thing to remember when aiming for a high open rate is ensuring your distribution lists are up-to-date with relevant contacts. When it comes to this, there's no substitute for a reliable database like the one from Agility PR Solutions.

Bearing in mind how many other emails journalists receive on a day-to-day basis is also key. Ensuring you get your pitch across in a to-the-point, concise way is essential. This is where the preview text shines. We don't even include a 'Hope you are well' in our press release distributions; when a journalist sees that pop up in the corner of their computer, why would they be inclined to click the notification and open the email? Instead, we summarize the pitch into a short, snappy sentence and lead with this to entice the journalist to open the email and read on.



Jayne Brooks, [Proactive International PR](#)

[sender of the email with the top open rate]

SECTION 2: EMAILS WITH TOP CLICKTHROUGH RATES*



Open rates are one thing — the crucial first step in gaining earned media coverage — but when your clickthrough rates start climbing, that's when you know you're doing something right.

After identifying those email distributions with the highest clickthrough rates, we dove into their specifics, namely:

- 1 The day and time at which each was sent
- 2 Was the email personalized and friendly, or a copy-and-paste of the press release?
- 3 How many links were included, and which types earned the most clicks
- 4 The length of the email

What we found in the course of our analysis is that some of our clients are really freakin' good at enticing journos to click. Here's how you can be like them:

*See methodology on page 13.

4 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR CLICKTHROUGH RATES

1 They're sent on various days (duh), but Tuesday got the best results...BY FAR. In terms of time of day, the distributions with the most clicks were sent out around noon.

We're just telling you what we found, but middle of the day Tuesday seems like the right time for clicks.

2 Copy-and-pasted releases made up more than three-quarters of the top distributions. Turns out journalists and other influencers are busy, and don't necessarily need to be coddled.

No need to be friendly, you can just send the release.

3 The most common number of links present in these? Six and seven. And they only linked to three kinds of places: websites; YouTube (videos); Dropbox or Google Drive folders containing additional images or videos. Among the three types of links, clicks were quite evenly dispersed, though we did notice a slight preference for the Dropbox and Google Drive links.

Link to a Dropbox or Google Drive folder that has high-res images and videos in it. Seriously.

Modern Art Gallery Grand Opening Set For This Weekend



Elsie Todd

Tuesday, 11:52 AM

high-powered.journalist@pressedfortime.com

1



2

Philadelphia, PA (March 21) — The Pennsylvania Gallery of Modern Art will be opening its doors this Friday night. After three years of very hard work - wherein famed curator Emilio Bandalni was secured as the museum's inaugural director - the public will finally be welcome to see the state's greatest collection of modern painting and sculpture.

For high-resolution images of some of the pieces to be displayed, [follow this link to our Dropbox folder](#).

3

4

...

4 This one surprised us. The emails that earned the top click-through rates were longer than we anticipated, oftentimes clocking in at over 800 words.

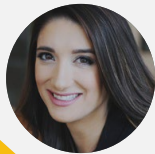
If you've got the info, go big. If not, keep it short. Best to let the nature of your distribution dictate.

PRO TIP

2

Follow-ups are just as important as the initial pitch

Our team follows up with media contacts less than one week after sending the initial email distribution. Media contacts are flooded with emails every day, so your initial email may have been overlooked. Which is why follow-ups can be just as important as the initial pitch. Tracking opens and clicks is a fantastic way to make this step not just easier, but way more effective too. The fact that Agility has this functionality is just one of the reasons we're with them.



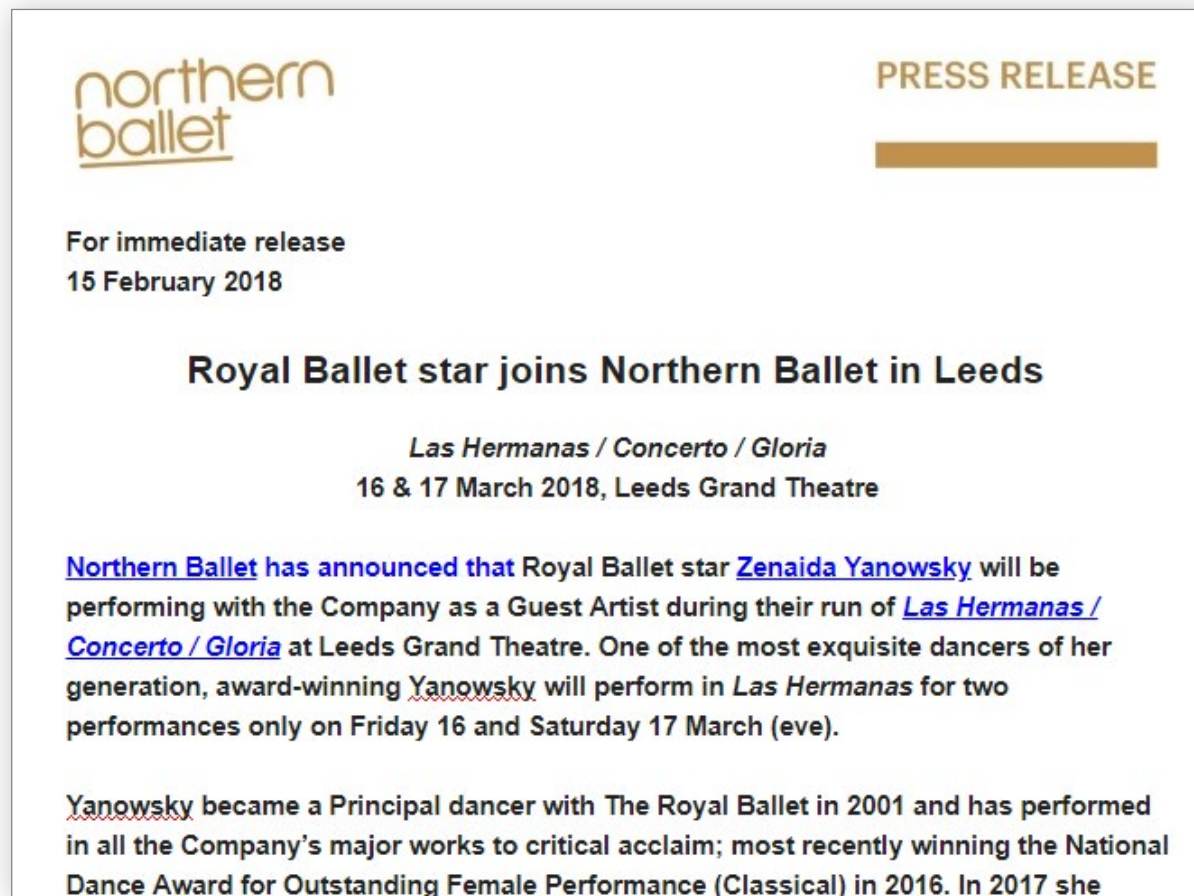
Emily Richett, [Richett Media](#)

[which had two of the top five click-through rates]

SECTION 3: TOP-PERFORMING EMAILS

We've been over what you need to do to get opens, and we've examined how to secure clicks, now it's time to take a look at a particular distribution that achieved both.

Behold that rarest of animals, the email pitch that gets opened AND clicked.



SEE FULL EMAIL

On February 15, Northern Ballet sent this email to 177 journalists; not only was it opened by 78 of them (a whopping 44.1% open rate), but its links earned 57 unique clicks.

Contrary to [studies](#) that claim email personalization improves both open and clickthrough rates, the email wasn't personalized yet still performed exceptionally well. In fact, very, very few of our top performing distributions were personalized.

Clocking in at 63 characters, the subject line is a masterclass: “Press Release: Royal Ballet star joins Northern Ballet in Leeds.” It's concise and to the point, and contains a very nice hook: a Royal Ballet star will be performing locally.

Once the journalist has opened, they're confronted with a good amount of information on the star herself, as well as on the performances she will take part in. But Northern Ballet has done the smart thing and included links for those eager to learn more. And notice near the bottom, just above the “Notes to Editors”...that's a link to a Dropbox folder containing, as they say, “high resolution images for press use.” Journalists love that.

Remember, they're atrociously busy and responsible not only for *writing* their articles, but for editing them, sourcing the imagery, and promoting them once they're published (because more and more, journalists are judged and rewarded based on shares and views). The point is, they can't spend even a minute scouring around for a good picture or video to accompany their story.

When you give them what they need, you make it easier for them to consider your pitch.

Northern Ballet and the agencies whose distributions appeared at the top of our lists — The Cult PR, Proactive International PR, and Richett Media, among them — understand that better than most.



PRO TIP



Give them everything they need

Journalists are time-poor and sometimes, even if they're interested in your pitch, you won't hear anything back. Just as likely is that a story falls through 10 minutes before deadline, a space in the magazine crops up, and yours could be in line to fill it.

If your email has everything they could possibly need to bash the story out in a rush, you're in luck. If they have to spend time chasing you for what they need, there's every chance you'll miss out.

Who, what, where, when, why are the obvious pieces of info you need to include, but you need to give them more. Is there a link for tickets? A quote from your client? How about high-res images in both landscape and portrait? Send a Dropbox link that's full of everything they could possibly need — a press release, every press-friendly image you've got, video files — chuck it all in to separated folders and send them the link.

Give them everything they need, except an excuse to pass over your story.



Matt Glass, [The Cult PR](#)

[which had two of the overall top 10 performing emails]

Let's recap:

Want opens? Send your email on Monday afternoon, from a personal email account, with a subject line between 60 and 75 characters. And, oh!, make that preview text tight and tasty.

Want clicks? Send a no-nonsense press release around midday on Tuesday. And — we can't stress this enough — include a link to a Dropbox or Google Drive folder that contains all the worldly goodies you could ever imagine a journalist needing in order to give your story the coverage it deserves.

But none of this matters a lick if you don't have good, reliable contact info for the journalists and influencers you want to reach. Of course, you can guess at email addresses, [like Drift did](#), or you can use a top-tier [media database](#). It's our professional and biased opinion that you go the database route.

The [Agility media database](#) has been recognized as an industry leader by G2 Crowd and is top-rated by our users for how easy it makes finding and connecting with journalists. Search by keyword, beat, media type, location, or even track social conversations that matter to your brand to find the people most likely to spread your message. Once you've got 'em, simply add them to a media list and send your distribution from right in the platform. It couldn't be easier.

To see just how simple and effective Agility can be, take a quick video tour of our media database. We think you'll be glad you did.

[TAKE THE VIDEO TOUR!](#)

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

We analyzed 4,453 distributions, and broke them down a couple of ways: by open rate and by clickthrough rate.

The reason for the first is straightforward. If an influencer doesn't open your email, that's it, you're done. To calculate open rate, we just divided the number of unique opens by the number of recipients.

The calculated clickthrough rate, we divided the number of unique clicks by the number of unique opens — what is commonly known as “relative clickthrough rate.” The reason we wanted to look at clickthrough rate is twofold: 1) it indicates a level of engagement on the part of the recipient, and 2) it gives us a chance to plug the fact that when you use our tool, you can track exactly who clicked where in your email, making follow-up a piece of cake.