



The Human's Guide To Writing Cold Emails That Don't Sound Like a Spammy Robot

How to research your sales prospects & craft highly personalized emails to build a lasting rapport

SalesFolk[™] 

by Heather R Morgan



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Why Sending Spammy Cold Emails Will Actually Hurt You

How do you get more than 100 people to respond to a single email template?

What message can you write to pique the interest of your childhood idol to convince him or her to have lunch with you?

Whether you're writing a mass email campaign that goes to thousands of prospects, or a one-on-one email to catch a really important person's attention, you shouldn't forget that these recipients are living and breathing humans too.

Cold emailing isn't rocket science, and doesn't require graduate school to master, but you can't forget that its purpose is to start a conversation: nothing more and nothing less.

You shouldn't expect that your prospects will buy a \$10,000 product from a single cold email, nor should you be so vague and indirect that your reader doesn't even know how they should respond.

The best cold emails have dead-simple messages that feel thoughtful.

No gimmicks. No jargon. No salesy or marketing Bulls**t that makes your message feel inauthentic or impersonal.



For the last 10+ years I've written at least 1 cold email a day. Cold emails are my obsession, and have played an instrumental role in my life, allowing me to see outcomes like these:

- *Writing a single email template that got one B2B startup at least 16 new customers*
- *Interviews with CEOs from the fastest growing startups in America*
- *Raising an entire round of funding from an email campaign that had a 67% response rate*
- *...and even getting some free plane tickets around the world*

Today, I have an entire business founded on cold emailing. Because cold emails are critical for anyone looking to get new business, I'd like to share what I've learned over the years with you. I've condensed my 10+ years of cold emailing into a single guide, designed to help you start writing higher-performing cold emails today.

If you follow this advice carefully, you too can learn to write cold email campaigns with response rates that are at least twice the industry standard.



1. E-Stalk Your Cold Email Prospects Like A Journalist

You can't craft a good cold email if you aren't thoughtful. The first step to creating a single cold email or building a full blown campaign is understanding your audience.

WHO ARE YOU SENDING COLD EMAILS TO?

Yoga instructors are very different than CEOs, and both are an entirely different creature than a VP of Marketing or Engineering.

Before you start writing any cold emails, you need a crystal clear understanding of who you're writing to. Without this, you're hopeless.

Here are a few helpful questions to ask yourself about your audience before getting started:

1. What title/role am I contacting?
2. What size company do they work for?
3. What industry are they in? (Are there industry-specific terms I should know?)
4. What are their priorities at this time?
5. What pain points do they have? What's really keeping them up at night?
6. How can you solve these pain points?
7. What do they read? Who are the experts they respect and follow? What kinds of things do they talk about?

The best way to answer these questions is to actually talk to someone who fits the same buyer persona. This could be a friend, colleague, or one of your customers. However, if you don't have access to these people and need to get started, a great approach is to do what I like to refer to as "e-stalking."

Once you have decided what persona you're reaching out to, and what criteria defines that persona, make a list of 5-10 people in each buyer persona that you want to contact.

Once you have a list of these people, research the heck out of them.



I. LINKEDIN RESEARCH

Go on LinkedIn and learn everything you can about the prospects you've chosen to research. Make careful notes, paying special attention to any keywords you think you can include in your cold email campaign for this persona.

Pay careful the “skills section,” as it's very keyword rich and let's you quickly learn about their duties and which software or tools they're using.

For example, let's say I want to create a cold email campaign for “VP Sales Strategy & Operations” roles at companies in the Software & IT industries with 200-5000 employees. I would do a LinkedIn search and get these results:

Industry: Information Technology and Services x Industry: Computer Software x

Company Size: 201-500 x Company Size: 501-1000 x

Company Size: 1001-5000 x Reset

Joe Fowler ^{2nd}
 VP, Sales Strategy & Operations at New Relic, Inc.
 San Francisco Bay Area • Information Technology and Services
 ▶ 6 shared connections • Similar

Past: Associate Partner - Corp Strategy, Product Development, Marketi...
 I focus on growth **strategy**, **sales** & marketing **strategy**, and innovation & product design services...

Past: MBA Graduate at MIT Sloan School of Management
 ...**strategy**, marketing and tech **strategy** • Led team... (Tsinghua, Fudan) • President of the Technologoy industry...

Connect

Richard Steinhart ^{2nd}
 Vice President Sales, Strategy and Operations | Visionary Influencer for Fast Growth B2B Technology Companies
 San Francisco Bay Area • Information Technology and Services
 ▶ 8 shared connections • Similar

Current: Vice President Sales Strategy and Operations at Imperva
 Past: Vice President Sales & Marketing Operations at Informatica
 Senior Director Americas Inside Sales at Informatica
 Inside Sales Manager & Other Titles at Informatica

Connect

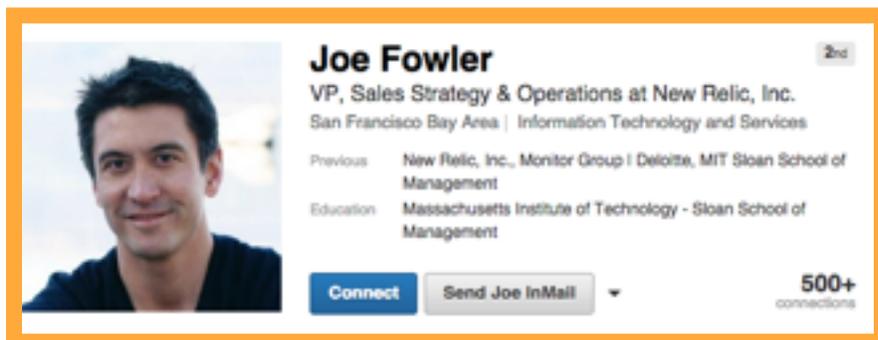
Yamini Rangan ^{2nd}
 Vice President, Sales Strategy and Operations at Workday
 San Francisco Bay Area • Computer Software
 ▶ 4 shared connections • Similar

Current: Vice President, Sales Strategy and Operations at Workday
 Director, Operations and Strategy at Workday

Connect

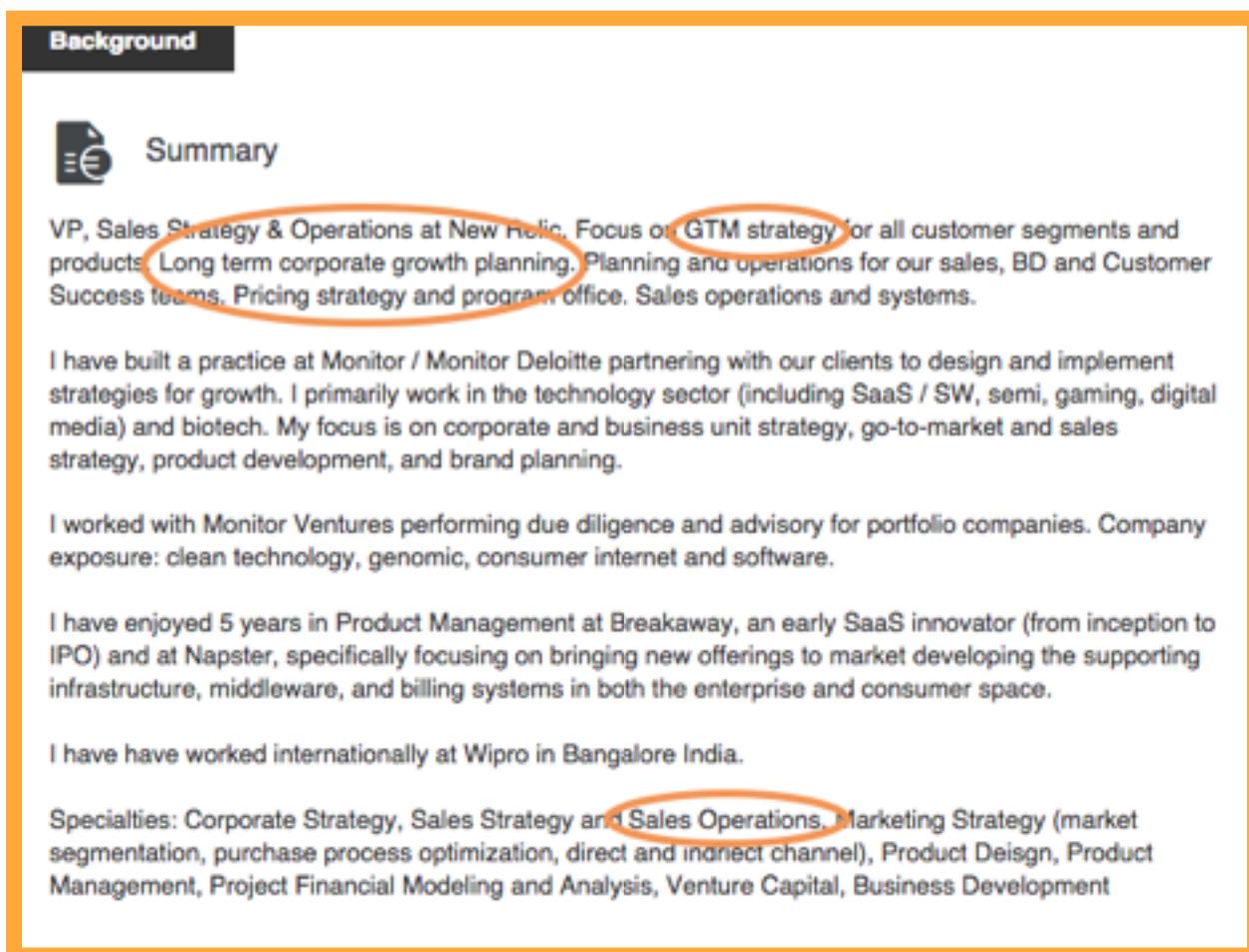


Now, let's look at one of the profiles on the list:
JOE FOWLER, THE VP OF SALES & STRATEGY AT NEW RELIC



Quickly parsing through Joe's LinkedIn profile, a few things stick out in my mind:

- I. In his "Background," Joe uses a lot of language that indicates he's a strategic thinker, such as "GTM strategy," "long term corporate growth planning," and many more.





The words “strategy” and “planning” repeatedly come up in his about section, job experience, and skills. (This isn’t surprising, given his title, but this is still important to include in our notes.)

- II. Joe is highly educated. He has an MBA and studied economics, computer science, and cognitive science at U Penn.

An image showing educational background information with an orange border. Two orange ovals highlight the text: "Master of Business Administration (MBA) Entrepreneurial and Small Business Operations" and "University of Pennsylvania BSE, BA, Minor, Computer Science, Economics, Cognitive Science".

Massachusetts Institute of Technology - Sloan School of Management
Master of Business Administration (MBA) Entrepreneurial and Small Business Operations
2003 – 2005

University of Pennsylvania
BSE, BA, Minor, Computer Science, Economics, Cognitive Science
1993 – 1997

Activities and Societies: Cognitive Science, Minor & Research Worked with two Start-ups: Internet Hosting Service & University Book Distribution Graduate Level Econometrics Studies



- III. Joe has a global mindset and makes a point to note that he’s lived and worked abroad in India and China. It also says he speaks Chinese.

I have have worked internationally at Wipro in Bangalore India.



Languages

Chinese



IV. LinkedIn Recommendations are a gold mine for getting an idea about someone's personality, and how they interact with others, as well as how others perceive them.

This section is very keyword rich, and displays what KPIs and responsibilities are important to Joe's career.

The words "quality," "commitment," and "high standard" immediately jump out at me. While we might not be able to use these exact words in the email copy itself, we need to convey our own commitment to quality if we want Joe to reply. He is unlikely to respond to an email that doesn't sound intelligent or is put together haphazardly. In order to craft an email that gains Joe's trust, we must demonstrate that we can deliver awesome results to our customers.

Associate Partner - Corp Strategy, Product Development, Marketing & Sales
Monitor Group | Deloitte



Joshua Covey
FranklinCovey Education

“ Joe is a strong consultant who produces top quality work. He is driven by a sense of passion and commitment and consequently inspires high standards from those he leads.
January 29, 2009. Joshua reported to Joe at Monitor Group | Deloitte



Stephen Bronstein
Senior Product Manager / Operations Manager

“ Steve is being too modest here. He founded an early ASP, which was acquired. He then took over a large product group focusing on new service strategy at Breakaway.
October 8, 2003, Joe worked indirectly for Stephen at Breakaway Solutions

The recommendations Joe has both given and received are very terse and to the point. All cold emails should be short and readable, but this is especially critical when emailing someone like Joe.



When looking at the recommendation Joe gave to Stephen Bronstein, you start to get a sense of how Steve thinks and talks. You begin to understand the kind of merits Joe respects.

After you finish 5-10 names, you can see if there are any overlapping keywords that you should weave into your email campaign. Picking 5-10 people from the “VP Sales Strategy & Operations” search we did on LinkedIn, we came up with these common keywords:

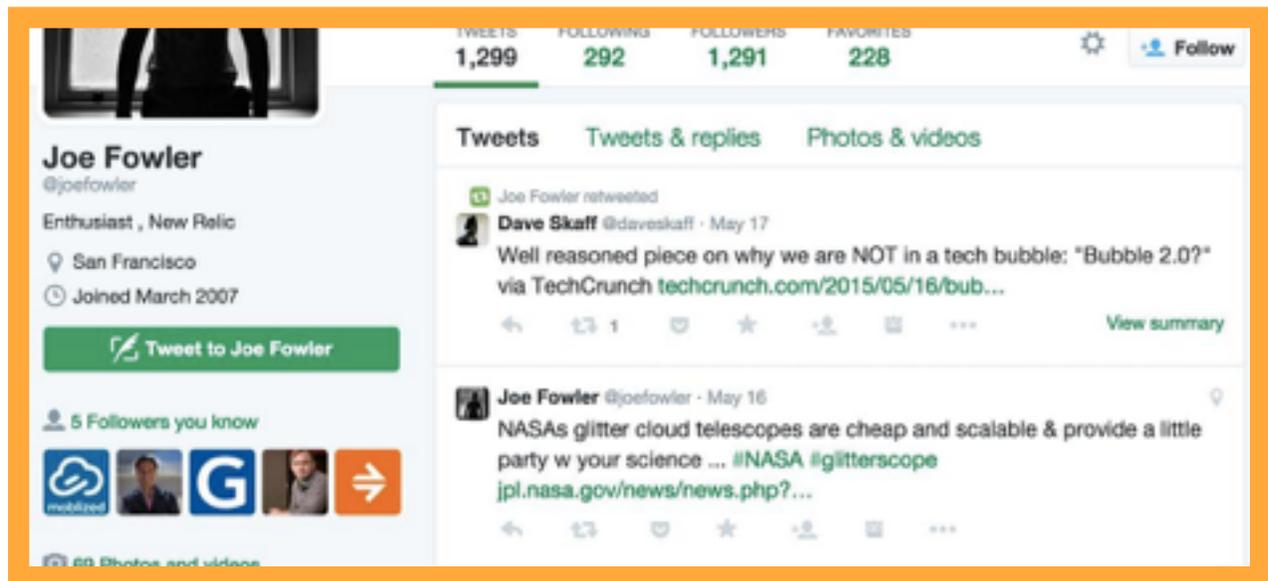
KEYWORDS:

- strategy
- sales operations
- product marketing/management
- sales enablement
- business/channel strategy
- business/sales process
- Salesforce.com
- leadership
- SaaS
- CRM

II. TWITTER & SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH

Next, hit twitter and google. Parse through your prospects’ twitter feeds to see what kinds of things they share, and pay close attention for content type and recurring keywords. See if you can find any blogs they’ve created in a Google search, and check out their Google+ if they’re active on there. If they’ve spoken at conference or other things, you can look at that too. The more you know about them, the better off you are.

Let's look at Joe Fowler's Twitter profile:



Based on the type of content Joe's sharing, it's very apparent that Joe is more "left-brained" and has a strong interest in data, analytics, and science.

If you did the same research on 5-10 other people with "VP Sales Strategy & Operations" titles, you would find somewhat similar trends in their content. This tells you you should tailor your email content for this persona to be more **analytical and numbers driven**.

People in these roles tend to have a strong "*bullshit detector*," and so you need to build skepticism into your emails, making all your statements credible to their critical eye. In general no intelligent person will believe vague and grandeur statements, but these people especially will not.



When dealing with more analytical people, you should include data-driven results wherever possible.

Instead of saying something like:

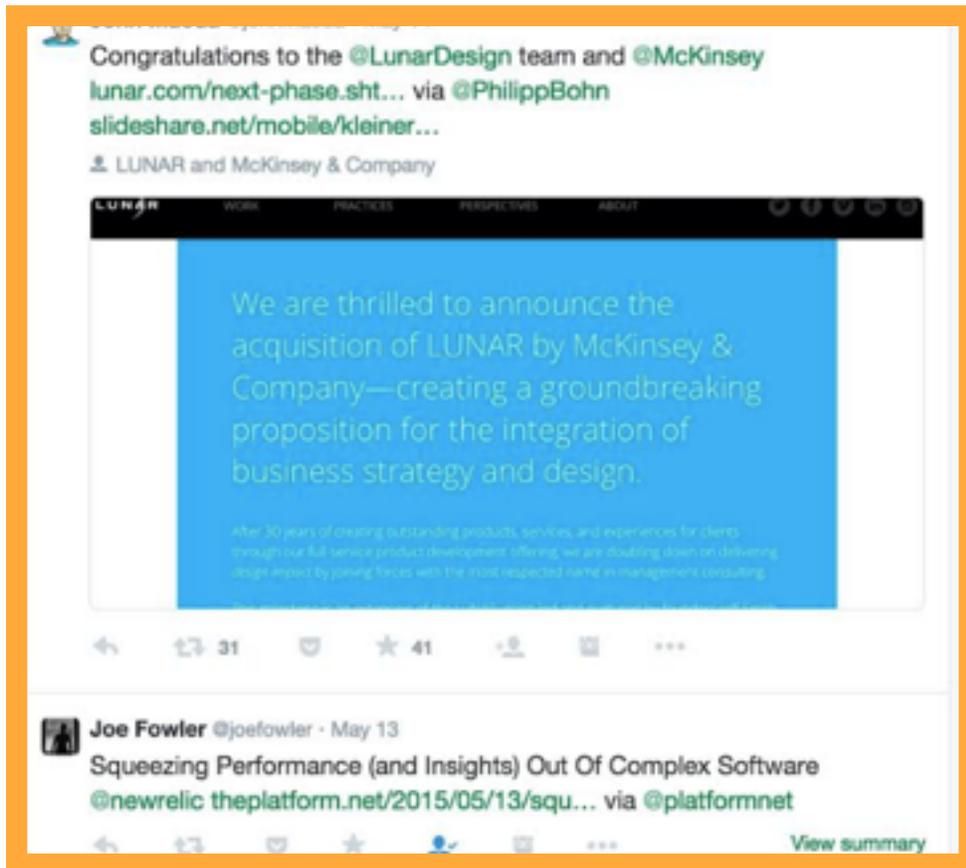
“We have the best software in the business and win lots of awards.”

You should be saying:

“Our software helped [Client x] double their qualification rate from 15% to 32% in only 3 months.”



It's also clear that Joe is interested in NASA, space, technology and design. This may or may not be relevant to the other people in the same buyer persona, but as we conduct our research it's important to try to understand the mindset of our audience.



In order to write effective cold emails (or any copy for that matter) you need to gather knowledge of what your readers love, hate, fear and desire. You want to try to learn what they do on the weekend for fun, what their daily routine is like, what they like to read and listen to, where they eat, etc. The more you know about them, the easier it will be for you to craft an appealing message that they will strongly identify with and relate to.

The deeper your research goes, the better your cold emails will be. If you want responses, you need to make the recipient feel like you're one of them. You want to convey the sense that you genuinely want to get to know them and their world more, and have an intelligent conversation with them.



2. Always Make Your Cold Emails Feel Personal

I. PICK ONE PROSPECT TO WRITE FOR

How can you write a cold email that feels like it's a one-on-one request that's actually going out to hundreds or thousands of people?

I'll let you in on a little secret: **write for one person.**

At least at first.

After you've done research on 5-10 people, pick one of them to write for.

Since I've already shown you the research example on Joe Fowler at New Relic, I'll use him as an example.

II. THINK ABOUT HOW YOU CAN EXCITE YOUR PROSPECT

So, what do we know about Joe?

Based on our LinkedIn and Twitter "research" (A.K.A. "e-stalking") we have learned that:

-  He's a highly analytical person who values numbers and hard evidence
-  He cares a lot about process and strategy
-  He has an interest in NASA and space



Using this information, I need to:

- I. **Show That I've Done My Homework.** I need to sprinkle in bits of relevant information that demonstrates that I understand Joe and what matters to him.
- II. **Convince Joe he needs to talk to me.** Joe is an intelligent guy who probably gets a lot of generic cold email requests, so I need to convey that I'm someone he can have a thoughtful and interesting conversation with.
- III. **Remove risk and begin to build trust.** I need to mention an example of a solid case where I have driven strong results for another client. (The more relevant the client is to New Relic, the better.)

Using this information, I would send Joe an email like this if I wanted to have a conversation with him about how we could improve New Relic's cold emails:



EXAMPLE OF A "ONE-ON-ONE" COLD EMAIL

"SUBJECT: idea for New Relic's cold emails
Hey Joe,

I saw on Twitter that you're also a big astronomy fan too. (By the way, thanks for sharing the article about "NASA's glitterscopes." That blew my mind!)

Do you ever check out NASA's "picture of the day?" My dad's a scientist, and he's always sharing beautiful pictures of nebulas with me.

Anyways, I actually have an idea for a cold email campaign that I think could generate dozens of highly qualified leads for New Relic. One of DataDog's competitors used a similar strategy to double their qualified leads in Q1, and I think it could work for your sales team too.

When can we have a 7 minute call so I can share the idea with you?

Cheers,
Heather"



There's a few things you should take note of in this email:

-  I started the conversation mentioning Joe's interest—NASA "glitterscopes." I complimented him & established that we have something in common.
-  I reinforced our shared interest in space, and tried to offer value to Joe with "NASA's Picture of the Day." This could be a future talking point as well.
-  I demonstrated my ability to drive results for a company similar to New Relic.
-  I defined the length of our call to lower Joe's risk of losing too much time.

PROTIP



Be a little bit weird.

It shows that you're human (not a spammy Robot), and makes you memorable.

However, do be careful not to go off on an irrelevant tangent that distracts your prospect, or be so weird that you turn them off.

The best way to make your cold emails interesting is to mention something that you suspect your prospect would relate to, with like my "love for space."



3. Make Mass Emails Feel Like One-On-One Requests

I. WHY SALES NEEDS BOTH QUALITY & QUANTITY

Unless you're only focusing on a handful of high-priority targeted accounts, you probably don't have time to do all the research and writing it took to write that one email to Joe, nor should you.

Today we are fortunate enough to have enough information and tools at our fingertips that we can send mass targeted email campaigns that feel personal.

Sending cold emails to prospects is a lot like online dating on OK Cupid (*which I like to refer to as "Okay-Cupid"*). Yes, sales and dating are both numbers games, but if you solely focus your efforts on quantity instead of quality, you will not get many responses from quality people.

Today sales is about velocity—as a salesperson, your job is to find the fastest way to start engaging conversations with people who are highly qualified to buy your product or service.

Spending a lot of time sending emails that don't get any responses, or blasting thousands of emails to people who aren't fit to buy from you, is a waste of time and can tarnish your brand's image.

II. HOW TO REVERSE ENGINEER A COLD EMAIL

So how can I take a message like the one I drafted to send to Joe Fowler, and “reverse engineer” it to be sendable to every “VP Sales Strategy & Operations” title with business criteria similar to New Relic?

First I would need to think about which information is relevant to the entire industry, and not just Joe and his personal interests.

That means I probably need to remove the sentences about NASA.

Next, I need to think of another sentence that would be relevant to this audience and the existing message I've written.



I like to start most of my cold emails with a question because it's more engaging.

Finally I need to look for any place that I mentioned Joe's name, New Relic, or other company-specific information.

I must decide what things I can create custom-inserts for, and what I should remove or make generic.

In the case of mentioning "Data Dog's competitor," I should either create a merge field `{!Client_Competitor}`, or simply write "your competitor" instead. Having an actual company name makes a far more compelling cold email, but also takes work to add an extra column of data to your mail merge's CSV file.

Here's what the mass template version of that email might look like:

EXAMPLE OF A "REVERSE-ENGINEERED" EMAIL TEMPLATE



*"SUBJECT: idea for `{!Company}`'s cold emails
Hey `{!First}`,*

Is `{!Company}` doing outbound email campaigns to generate appointments with qualified leads right now?

If so, are your sales reps' cold emails seeing response rates above or below 10%?

I have an idea for a cold email campaign that I think could generate dozens of highly qualified leads for `{!Company}`. `{!Client_Competitor}` used a similar strategy to double their response rate from qualified leads in Q1.

When can we have a 7 minute call so I can share the idea with you?

*Cheers,
Heather"*



The email is less specific, but still effective. It has enough custom inserts and relevance to the audience to feel personal. If I knew 200 people (or even 20) who were VP Sales Strategy & Operations who loved astronomy, I would love to send them an email more like the first, but that's probably not going to happen.

If I do enough research, I might find other commonalities that I could use to create a similar sentence to the "NASA" one though. For example, is there a list of VP Sales Strategy & Operations people that all recently spoke at a conference or attended the same industry event? Or is there a list of the top 100 software companies that I could use to build a list of targeted accounts? If so, I could then find the appropriate person at each company and build an email list around that.

III. HOW TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON A NEW INDUSTRY

If you're targeting a particular industry, you should research that industry a bit too. When thinking about VP Sales Operations people who work at B2B SaaS companies, you might do a search for "SaaS 'Sales Operations' metrics." By doing that search, we found a very useful article from Inc that gave us a wealth of keywords that we can potentially include in our cold emails

- **Speed-To-Contact:** Measuring the time elapsed before the first live conversation between someone from the sales team and the lead provides management with an understanding of the **quality of leads** being generated, especially when compared with speed-to-contact attempt (see below). For example, if you're getting a lot of leads where the speed-to-contact attempt is fast, but the actual speed-to-contact is slow, then it means there's not a high level of intention. If that's the case, you need to talk to your marketing team and see what they might do differently to get you better quality leads.
- **Qualification Rate by Lead Source:** Most sales and marketing teams measure conversion rate and ROI by lead source but neglect qualification rate. However, this metric is really a leading indicator of whether what marketing is producing is likely to translate to pipeline. The sources that have a low qualification rate need to be tweaked or eliminated quickly.

Sales Team Performance Metrics

- **Speed-To-Contact Attempt:** Speed-to-contact attempt is the time it takes from when a lead is received to when you call or email them in response to their inquiry. This metric is a leading indicator of whether your sales people are covering the "basics." Speed to reach out to a hand-raiser is one of the metrics that is also most correlated with the ultimate metric, your **conversion rate**. If a salesperson is calling quickly, it means they've not only got their head in the game but you will also see results in them hitting higher sales numbers. This metric also provides sales managers with insight into which sales reps are lagging behind or failing to contact leads in a timely matter.



“Speed-To-Contact,” “quality of leads,” “Qualification Rate by Lead Source,” “conversion rate,” and “Speed-To-Contact Attempt” are all keywords we might use in our email campaign.

Forums are also a great place to look.

Once you decide which forums to look at, you should search them internally for specific keywords. By doing a simple google search, I was able to find this list of forums and top blog posts on B2B sales.

[The 20 Best B2B Sales Blogs - RingDNA](#)

www.ringdna.com/blog/the-10-best-b2b-sales-blogs/ ▾

Apr 14, 2015 - Check out the 20 best blogs for b2b sales reps! ... When it comes to sales, David Brock is one of the top authorities around. Luckily for us, in ...

[Top Sales & Marketing Blogs — 2014 - Top Sales World](#)

topsalesworld.com/topsalesblogs/ ▾

The blog is dedicated to giving you the information you need to be more effective at what you do. It covers all things B2B for sales, marketing, research, and ...

[Best B2B Sales Blogs | Top Sales Experts on Twitter |](#)

www.count5.com/Best_B2B_Sales_Blogs.aspx ▾

Best B2B Sales Blogs | Top Sales Experts on Twitter. Tweets from @EricBlumthal /best-b2b-sales-blogs · home | news | legal | privacy | alliance program | contact ...

[Top 25 B2B Sales Influencers for 2014 | OpenView Labs](#)

labs.openviewpartners.com/top-b2b-sales-influencers-2014/ ▾

Jun 16, 2014 - See who made our 3rd annual list of the best B2B sales influencers ... She is a popular blogger, and frequent speaker/trainer at sales meetings.

[Resource for Top B2B Sales Blogs - Score More Sales](#)

www.scoremoresales.com/blog/b2b/resource-top-b2b-sales-blogs/ ▾

Sep 13, 2013 - Nearly every day I get asked about top b2b sales blogs, books, and resources for the sales reps on the front lines - those with quotas who have ...

[Sales Blogs: The 18 You Should Be Following | Sales Engine](#)

www.salesengine.com/sales/sales-blogs-the-18-you-should-be-following/ ▾

Apr 2, 2013 - With thousands and thousands of blogs about sales out there, ... follow these authors on Twitter is by subscribing to our Top Sales Blogs twitter list. ... <http://blog.pointclear.com/blog/> which explores issues related to B2B sales, ...



In general, Quora, Reddit, and industry specific forums are good places to also investigate. Here are a few results I found when researching “B2B SaaS companies” on Quora:

What are the top reasons why startups developing B2B products fail?

Answer 1 of 3 • View All

Paul Dunstone, Startup Founder and CEO — acquisition and forgetting existing customers * A lack of consistent product development and research * A failure to effectively communicate a product's value proposition... (more)

Upvote

Downvote Comment Share



How do you do market research for a startup idea when you develop a B2B product?

Answer 1 of 2 • View All

Jan Davids, I've worked in market ... (more) — It's pretty simple. ... Get a group of 5-10 potential customers and talk to them often and keep on showing them the product as it evolves. ... (more)

Upvote

Downvote Comments 1+ Share



What is the best way to structure and quantify a product/development team for complex B2B PaaS?

Igor Glavanic, Director @ Parcus Group — Hi there... as you start on this here are some suggestions but I will make a few assumptions first. ... You have completed some market review and know what the customers want,... (more)

Upvote

1

Downvote Comment Share





Also make sure to check out at least 5-10 of your prospects' employers.

Visit their company website. Try to understand what each person's responsibilities. What are their goals? What problems do they face every day? What could get them fired?

Look at their company's website and try to analyze what their business is and who they're selling to. This also helps you make sure this is indeed the correct audience/person for you to be reaching out to.

After you've gathered all this information and taken extensive notes, you're ready to start *thinking* about how to create your cold emails. Skipping these step will make your cold email campaign a guaranteed flop.



But don't leave just yet! ...Keep reading!

There's still one last page left!



4. A Few Final Cold Email Tips

Your cold emails are often the first impression you and your company have on your prospects, so your messages need to be as targeted and focused as possible.

Effective cold emails help you start warmer conversations and develop meaningful relationships with your prospects. Spending time researching your audience might seem like a lot of extra work, but you only really need to do it once in a while for each buyer persona. If you **do not** go this extra distance, there's little point in sending any cold emails at all.

Who are your prospects more likely to buy from? Someone who spams their inbox with gimmicky nonsense, or someone who is thoughtful and relevant? You'll get many more "yeses" to your cold emails when you've taken the time to develop a genuine relationship with them.



WANT MORE ADVICE ON COLD EMAIL?

Check out our new cold email mastery course.

www.salesfolk.com/emailmastery, and learn everything you need to know to become an expert in cold email.

The first lesson is free, and contains some of our "winning templates."

You won't just learn how to copy a few templates and reuse them over and over--you'll learn a deep understanding of the psychology and strategies behind cold email so that you can "catch fish for yourself," no matter who your audience is.

If you're interested in having SalesFolk create hyper-targeted email campaigns for your business, email heather@salesfolk.com for more information or visit the Salesfolk website and fill out the "**consultation request**" form at the bottom of the page.