

# **The Ultimate Email Marketing Guide**

*Turn Every Email Into an Opportunity*

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# **PART I: WHY EMAIL**

# Eight Touches

It is a Tuesday. A woman clicks your ad, and that click cost you four dollars. She lands on the product page, reads the top half, scrolls past the reviews, opens a second tab, and leaves. Ninety seconds, door to door.

Three weeks later she buys the same thing from the result underneath yours.

You paid four dollars to walk her through the category, teach her the difference between the cheap version and the good one, and then hand her to the store next door with her wallet already out. She is not a bad customer. She did what almost everybody does, which is leave, think about it, and buy later somewhere else.

**Bottom line:** Traffic is rented and the address is owned. If a visitor leaves your site without giving you a way to reach her again, every dollar you spent getting her there was a donation to whoever sells to her on touch five. The Email Acquisition System is the thing you put between the click and the back button so the conversation keeps going after she leaves.

## The four dollar donation

Most e-commerce money goes to renting attention by the visit. You buy the click, you get the visit, and when the visit ends the relationship ends with it. Here is how I put it in the 2013 white paper, and I have not found a reason to soften it:

*Unfortunately, the odds are slim to none that they will return to your site. More than likely, they will buy a very similar product or service from one of your competitors. All of the valuable time, money and resources you spent to get visitors interested, has only helped your competition immensely.*

Look at what you actually own in that transaction. Not the ad platform, which can change its auction, its policy, or its mind about your account on a Thursday. Not the search ranking. Not the social account, where the number next to “followers” describes people who are allowed to see your posts if an algorithm feels like showing them. **You own the addresses and nothing else on that list.**

I am not against paid traffic. I bought a lot of it and so should you. I am against buying it with no bucket under the faucet. If your ad spend for a month is five thousand dollars and the number of new email addresses you collected that month is zero, you did not run a campaign, you ran a fundraiser for your competition.

The fix is one step on the page, and it is boring: something worth an address, and a box to type the address into. That is Chapter 3, the Bait. Everything after it is what you do with the address once you have it.

Everything in this book came out of one company. I started PAR Program in 2012 and ran it as CEO until 2015. We sold a platform: an email marketing system, customer profiles, and the people to run the thing for you. I owned the architecture and the roadmap, hired twelve people, six in the office and six scattered around the country, and we took about twenty beta accounts and turned them into signed contracts with Adidas, Marlboro, State Farm and a national political committee.

I sat in those meetings myself. Every one of those logos put us through a legal review, then an IT review, then a security review, before anybody would sign a page, which is a long way from a four-store sandwich shop printing a coupon. Same client list, same system. The emails worked the same way at both ends.

GoSocial bought the company in November 2015 for twelve million dollars and I stayed six months to hand it over. The software is gone. What I sold those companies was never really the software, it was this system, and the system is the part that is still here. That is why it is in a book instead of a sales demo.

## **Eight touches**

Nobody buys on touch one. That is the whole rule and you can stop reading this section right there.

Back in 2013, when I ran PAR Program, the number we ran on was eight. People need to interact with a service or product eight (8) times on average before making a buying decision. I wrote in the original guide that many studies show this. I am going to be straight with you in the 2026 edition: I never had the study in my hand. It was the number everybody in sales quoted, it matched what I saw in my own funnels, and it works as a rule of thumb. Treat it that way, not as science.

**The exact number does not matter, the shape does.** Maybe it is five for a nine dollar phone case and twenty for a three thousand dollar coaching program. The shape is the same either way: the first visit is an introduction, the purchase happens several conversations later, and if you have no way to start conversation number two, somebody else gets to have conversations two through eight with your customer.

Once you count that way, the question stops being how to make this visit convert and starts being how to get to touch eight. An email sequence gets you seven more touches for the cost of the first one. That is the entire economic argument for this book.

Here is the line from 2013 that I still like best: “What if you could rapidly educate them as if they have read your entire website?” Twenty days of email does that. She reads your case for your product in ten short pieces, at her kitchen table, on her phone, in her own time, from somebody she has come to recognize. She could never have absorbed that in ninety seconds on a Tuesday and you were crazy to ask her to.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** The biggest check of my life, the \$132,994.97 AdSense month in 2005 that Chapter 8 tells properly, was rent money. Every dollar of it depended on somebody else’s traffic and somebody else’s payout, and I had no direct line to a single one of the people who produced it. I thought I was a genius. I was a tenant with a very good landlord. If you only take one thing out of my whole career, take that.

## The system on one page

The Email Acquisition System has five moving parts, and I want you to have the map before you read the parts.

**The Bait** is what you hand somebody in exchange for an address. A coupon, an e-book, a white paper, a video, free access to a site. Back in 2013 we ran a free sandwich coupon for a four-store franchise and the coupon did two jobs at once, because it bought the address and it walked the person into the restaurant. Chapters 3 and 4.

**The Persona** is who the emails come from. A consistent human being with a name, a back story and a way of talking, part friend and part mentor. Not “The Team” and not “Customer Care”. Mail from a company gets read like mail from a company. Chapters 5 through 9.

**The Sequence** is the schedule: twenty days, ten emails, starting the second somebody hits submit. Day 1 confirms and delivers the bait. Days 2 and 4 give value. Day 7 asks the list a question. Day 11 reports back what they said. Days 14 through 18 are the offer. Day 20 delivers the Special Report. Chapters 18 and 19.

**The 3 Persuasive P's, Pain, Potential and Proof**, are the shape of every sales email inside the Sequence, in that order. Name what hurts, show what life looks like without it, then prove it with somebody who is not you. Chapters 10 through 13.

**The Gift days** are days 14 to 18, where the money is. The paid offer presented as a gift with a real deadline, four emails plus a last reminder on the final day. Chapter 19.

That is it. The system I published in 2013 was a system I had coincidentally developed over the last 8 years while working on my own websites and products, which is a polite way of saying I built it by mailing my own lists, screwing it up, and keeping whatever did not lose money. PAR Program came later, in 2012, and gave the method a company and a client list to run against.

## **The way this breaks**

The most common failure is a gap, not a bad email. Somebody builds day 1 and day 2, gets busy with the actual business, and the subscriber's next contact is a sales email three weeks later from a name she no longer recognizes. She hits the spam button, and complaints are the one number the mailbox providers will actually punish you for. Write all ten emails and load them into the automation before you turn the form on. A fixed calendar only works if you write it once while you still care about it.

The quieter failure is tone. If days 1 through 11 never ask the reader for a single thing, day 14 shows up as a stranger with a clipboard. The day 7 question is what prevents that. It trains her to answer you, so the offer on day 14 is the second thing you have asked for instead of the first.

## **What 2026 changed**

Four things moved since I wrote the original, and none of them touch the system.

**Clicks cost more.** Every auction I have ever watched goes one direction, and the direction is up. That makes the capture step worth more, not less, because the more a visit costs the more insane it is to rent it once and throw the receipt away.

**Social reach is rented from an algorithm.** In 2013 a post to your own followers mostly reached your own followers. Every platform since then has learned it can throttle that and sell it back to you. An email you send to a confirmed address lands in a place the recipient chose to open, with no middleman deciding whether today is your day.

**Inboxes filter harder.** The mailbox providers tightened the rules on bulk senders in 2024, and now you authenticate your sending domain, keep complaints low, and give people a one-click unsubscribe, or you do not get delivered at all. That is plumbing, it is learnable in an afternoon, and Chapter 17 is nothing but that.

**A lot of email is now written by a machine**, and machine email all sounds the same. Even-toned, perfectly structured, allergic to a sentence that leaves you hanging. Which is excellent news for anybody willing to write like a person with a name and an opinion, because the Persona in Chapter 5 now stands out in a way it did not have to in 2013.

The 2013 sequence and the 2026 sequence are the same ten emails on the same ten dates, with two of the ten sharing day 18. What changed is the price of skipping the capture step, and it went up.

## Read the guides first

Before you jump into the email sequence please read through the guides. I wrote that sentence in 2013 because people were downloading the white paper, scrolling straight to the templates, pasting my dating-site emails into their pet supply store, and then telling me email does not work.

The emails in the back half of this book are worked examples, not a product. They are the output of decisions about bait, persona, pain and timing that happen before a single word gets typed. Copy the output without the decisions and you get a sandwich coupon email from a man named Michael to somebody who wanted a plumber.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Open your ad account right now and pull last month's spend. Then open your email platform and pull the number of new subscribers for the same month. Divide the spend by the subscribers. That number is what you currently pay per address, and if the division fails because the second number is zero, you just found the highest-return work available to you this week.

Which leaves the fair question of why you should take email advice from a guy you may have never heard of. In 2010 Fast Company Magazine gave me a title I had no business winning, against Shaquille O'Neal and Britney Spears and Katy Perry, and the only thing I had that they did not was a list that did what I asked. That story is Chapter 2.

## Do this Monday

- Pull last month's ad spend and last month's new subscriber count, and write the cost per address on a sticky note.

- Pick one page that paid traffic lands on and decide what you can give away on it. A coupon, a guide, a video, early access. Do not overthink this one, Chapter 3 will tell you why any bait beats no bait.
- Put a name and a face on the sending address before you write a word. Real person or pen name, but a person.
- Write the twenty-day calendar on paper: day 1, 2, 4, 7, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, 18, 20. Day 18 gets two emails, the second one being the last reminder. That is ten numbered emails plus the Day 20 Special Report. Leave the emails blank for now.
- Send yourself a test from your current platform to a fresh Gmail account and note where it lands. If it is in Promotions or Spam, read Chapter 17 before you write anything else.

# The Fast Company Story

In 2010 I was sitting in Lincoln, Nebraska, looking at a screen with my name on it in Fast Company Magazine, under the title “Most Influential Person on the Internet.”

My competitors in that contest were Shaquille O’Neal, Britney Spears, Katy Perry, and tons of other celebrities. Shaq could walk into any arena in America and get a standing ovation. I was a guy from Nebraska who ran a blog about making money online and had a fraction of the audience any of those people had.

I did not out-celebrity them. I could not. What I had was an email list of people who, for years running, had been getting things from me for free, and when I asked that list to go do one specific thing, a whole lot of them went and did it.

**Bottom line:** A following is people who watch you. A list is people who act when you ask. Fast Company’s contest measured action, not attention, which is why a guy from Nebraska out-influenced Shaq. Every ranking you actually care about in your business (sales, signups, seats filled, reviews left) measures the same thing. Build the list that acts.

## Following versus list

**A following is an audience and a list is a phone tree.** Those are different assets and they get confused constantly, usually by people selling follower counts.

A following is measured in people who have seen your name. That number is real, and it is not worthless. It is just passive. Somebody scrolling past a post at a stoplight has technically been reached, and that reach produces nothing you can put in a bank account.

A list is measured in people who gave you a specific piece of contact information on purpose, in exchange for something they wanted. The address is a small act of consent. They raised their hand once already, which is the single best predictor that they will raise it again.

Katy Perry in 2010 had an enormous following. If the contest had scored popularity, I would have finished somewhere below the people who repost her. It did not score popularity. It scored whether human beings would go do a thing, and doing a thing takes about thirty seconds of somebody’s actual life, which means it takes trust and not fame.

I have watched this play out the other direction too. When I sold NextPimp in 2009 (Chapter 7 has that story), the buyer was not paying for the traffic. It was paying for the database of people interested in ringtones, sitting in a list, reachable. Traffic is rented. The list is the part you own.

## Why they showed up

**The key is giving people real value. That's what creates influence.** I said that in 2013 and it is the only sentence in this book I would carve into something.

Here is the unglamorous version of my 2010 result. For years before that contest I had been writing on ShoeMoney.com and giving away everything I knew, including the stuff people normally sell. I posted the AdSense check. I posted what worked and, more usefully, what blew up in my face. I answered email from people who were never going to buy anything from me. Google made me famous by having me speak on panels around the world about how I made money, and on those panels I said the same things I said on the blog, to rooms full of people who had not paid me a dollar.

None of that was a plan to win a magazine contest. There was no contest yet. It was years of deposits into an account I did not know I was opening.

Then Fast Company ran the thing, and I made one withdrawal. I told my readers what the contest was, I told them what I wanted, and I asked them once. That is the entire mechanic. I did not buy anything, I did not build anything clever, and I have never claimed the contest was a masterpiece of strategy. It was a receipt.

That is why this book spends most of its pages on the bait, the persona and the emails that come before the ask. The ask is easy. Earning the right to make it takes months, and it is made out of things you gave away when nobody owed you anything.

## Make people do things

**While I don't have quite the following they do... I do know how to make people do what I want them to do.**

That line has been in this book since 2013 and I know exactly how it reads. It reads like a guy in a bad suit at a seminar. So let me take the mustache off it right now.

I cannot make anybody do anything. Nobody can. What I can do is ask a group of people who already trust me to take one clear action that I have made easy, at a moment when they have a reason to say yes. If the trust is not there, the same email produces silence, and I have sent plenty of emails that produced silence.

Persuasion is knowing what somebody already wants and showing them a path to it. Manipulation is getting them to act against their own interest by hiding something from them. The line between those is not a feeling, it is a test: would the person be glad they did it a month later? If the answer is no, you did not persuade anybody, you took something. Chapter 10, Anatomy of a Sales Email, draws that line with a sharper knife, because the three P's are where the power actually sits and where people are most tempted to lie.

The practical reason to stay on the right side of it is that a list remembers. If I had spent 2005 to 2010 pushing junk on ShoeMoney.com readers, that 2010 ask would have landed on an audience that had learned to ignore me. Burned lists do not bounce. They just quietly stop opening, and you find out six months later when a launch you were counting on does nothing.

## **What a following costs now**

**Every platform since 2010 has throttled reach and sold it back to you.** That is the biggest change between the first edition of this guide and this one.

In 2010 a post to a page with 100,000 fans still went out to a meaningful chunk of those fans. Then organic reach got squeezed, on every network, in the same direction, for the same reason: reach is the inventory those companies sell. You built the audience, they meter the pipe. When the metering tightens, your cost to touch people you already convinced goes up, and nobody sends you a notice.

So the follower number correlates with action even less now than it did in 2010. There are accounts with six-figure follower counts that cannot move forty people to click a link, and there are people with a 3,000 address list who can fill a paid workshop in a day. I would rather have the 3,000.

An email still lands. Somebody typed their address, a mail server accepted it, and it sits in an inbox until a human deals with it. No ranking model decides whether today is your day. That is the whole reason this system survived thirteen years of platforms rising and dying: the delivery mechanism did not change owners.

The plumbing did get stricter, and I am not going to pretend otherwise. Mailbox providers now expect authentication on your domain, easy one-click unsubscribe, and complaint rates kept low, and if you ignore that you land in spam no matter how good the copy is. Chapter 17, Deliverability and List Hygiene, is the whole checklist. It is boring and it is the difference between a list that works and a list that exists.

The other 2026 change is on the copy side. A lot of email now gets written by AI, and it all sounds the same: smooth, agreeable, forgettable, with no specific person behind it. That is good news for you. A persona who sounds like an actual human with an actual opinion stands out in a way it did not have to in 2013.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Go find the largest audience number you own right now, on whatever platform it lives on, and ask it for one small thing this week with one link. Count the people who do it. That number, not the follower count, is the size of your real audience, and it is usually a gut punch. Better to take the gut punch now than during a launch.

## How to ask for one thing

**Ask for one action, once, with a reason.** When I asked my readers to go help me in that contest, the email did four things, and you can copy the shape for anything you ever need a list to do.

It asked for exactly one action. Not “check out the contest and also read my new post and also follow me over here.” One verb, one destination. Every additional option you add splits the response and some of your people just close the tab instead of choosing.

It made the action stupid easy. One link, straight to the thing, no hunting. If your ask requires a person to log in somewhere, find a tab, and figure out what you meant, you will lose most of them at the friction, and they will feel bad about it, which is worse.

It gave a reason that was about them or about me being a real person, not about a metric. People help a guy they know. Nobody on earth wants to help you hit a number.

It came from an account that had been depositing for years. That is the part you cannot fake, and it is the part everyone tries to skip.

Here is what goes wrong. A business gets a list of 9,000 addresses, sends nothing for eleven months, then sends a “we need your vote” email on a Friday. Half of it does not get delivered because the domain has no sending history. Of what arrives, most goes unopened because nobody recognizes the sender name. The people who do open it have no idea who this is, and a chunk of them hit the spam button, which makes the next send worse. The company concludes email is dead. Email is not dead. The account was empty and they made a withdrawal.

The fix is the twenty-day Sequence in Part VI, running on autopilot from the second someone hands over an address, so that on the day you finally need something, you have a list that knows your persona’s name and has gotten something useful from that persona five times already.

That is what the rest of this book is. While I don't have quite the following the pop stars do, in this guide I spell it out for you in several unique ways: what to give away so people hand over an address, who the emails come from, what those emails say, and in what order.

Which brings up the obvious objection, and it is the right one. Influence needs a list. You have zero addresses. Nobody is waiting on an email from you, and a contest asking your subscribers to do something is a fantasy when your subscriber count is a round number with nothing in front of it.

Good. Part II starts at zero, with a sandwich coupon.

## **Do this Monday**

- Write down your follower count on your biggest platform, then send that audience one small ask with one link, and write down how many people actually did it.
- List everything you have given away free in the last 90 days to people who never bought anything. If the list is empty, that is your problem, not your reach.
- Pick the one action you would want a list to take if you had one (buy, book, review, show up) and write the single sentence you would use to ask for it.
- Open your last five sends and count the number of distinct actions each one asked for. Anything over one gets cut to one.
- Check whether you own your list file. If your only copy of your customers lives inside a platform you do not control, export it this week.

## **PART II: THE BAIT**

# The Free Sandwich

Back in 2013 I met the owner of a Mr. Goodcents franchise at one of his own stores, and we stood there through part of a lunch rush working out what he could give away. It took about a minute to land on it. A free sandwich, when you buy one.

The offer went up online. Put your email address in the form, get the token back, and the free one only counts when you buy one. So people signed up from wherever they were sitting and then drove to the store to use it, which is the part the owner needed and the part almost nobody designs for.

That token was a PAR Program client's bait, and it is the cleanest example I have of the thing this chapter is about. It cost the store a sandwich. It bought them a customer they could email for years.

**Bottom line:** The Bait is whatever you give away to get somebody's email address, and it has to be worth more to the visitor than their address is to them. That is the entire test. The best bait passes a second test too: it does a job for your business at the same time it is buying the address. The free sandwich coupon got the address and walked the person through the door holding money.

## Start at square one

Let's start at square one and assume you have zero emails, I mean nothing. No list, no subscribers, no export sitting in a spreadsheet from a platform you stopped paying for. Zero.

From there the only question that matters is the one I asked at PAR Program before we wrote a single email for anybody:  
**what can I offer users that they will find value in so I can capture their email?**

Maybe you already have something. A coupon, an e-book, a whitepaper, a video or free access to a site. Any of those work. I have watched all five of them fill a list, and I am going to tell you in Chapter 4 that which one you pick matters a great deal less than you think it does.

What does not work is an empty box with the word "Newsletter" over it and a Subscribe button under it. Nobody in the history of the web has ever woken up wanting more newsletters. An address is not free to give away. Give one out and you get sold to, forever, by people you did not agree to hear from, and everybody who has had an inbox for more than a year knows it. You are asking for something with a real cost attached. So put something on the other side of the trade.

## Four stores in the middle of the pack

The Mr. Goodcents relationship started when four stores of a local sandwich franchise came to us ranked 40th, 52nd, 73rd and 89th among the 1,000-plus Mr. Goodcents franchises worldwide.

Read those numbers again, because they are the interesting part of this story and almost nobody notices them. **Those are not failing stores.** Fortieth out of a thousand-plus is the top five percent. Eighty-ninth is the top ten. Four stores all landing inside the top ten percent of a thousand-plus locations is not luck and it is not a turnaround story. That is where competent operators sit, somewhere respectable, with the obvious moves already made.

What they did not have was a way to talk to the person who had just bought a sandwich. Somebody walks in, hands over eight or nine dollars, walks out, and the store learns nothing and keeps nothing. That customer is now the property of whoever happens to be closest at lunchtime tomorrow.

So we put in the Email Acquisition System and the bait was a free sandwich coupon (when you buy one), given out online and redeemed at the register. In the original guide I wrote one sentence about what that did, and I have never improved on it: “This baited people to not only sign up for the email, but to also head into their restaurant.”

The sandwich was not the point. Here is the line from 2013 that I would put on the wall if I only got one: the most important part of this system was that the visitor’s information was captured and Mr. Goodcents can now use this information to market to customers for months and years to come. The sandwich was the price of the address. The address was the thing we were actually buying.

## What the rep told us

Five months after implementing our system, the Mr. Goodcents account rep met with us and revealed that their stores are now the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd highest grossing franchises in the world. INSANE, right?

Now let me tell you what I know and what I do not, because you should be suspicious of a story like that and I would rather you be suspicious out loud with me than quietly without me.

**That number came from the account rep, in a meeting, out of his mouth.** I never audited the franchise’s books. I never saw a corporate ranking report with a date on it. I am repeating what we were told by the person whose job it was to know, and I believed him then and I believe him now, and I also cannot hand you a document.

There is a second gap and it is right there in the arithmetic: four stores went in and three podium spots came out. I do not know what happened to the fourth. Maybe it landed fifth, maybe it landed twentieth. Nobody told us and I never asked, which in hindsight was lazy of me. The honest version of this story has that hole in it and I would rather show you the hole than fill it with something I made up.

What I will say flat out is what I said in 2013: there is no doubt in my mind that the Bait we put in front of those visitors was the leading reason it worked. Whatever the copy was, whatever the platform was, the coupon is what moved it, because the coupon did two jobs at once.

## The address is the asset

A free sandwich costs the store a few dollars in food and labor. One time. Then it is gone.

The address does not go away. That person is now reachable on a Tuesday in March when the store is slow, and again in July when a new sub launches, and again next January. Every one of those sends costs a fraction of a cent. **You are not giving away a sandwich, you are paying an acquisition cost**, and the only real question is whether the customer is worth more than the bait over the time you hold the address.

Run it on yourself before you run it on anything else. Take what a customer spends with you in a year, multiply by the number of years a customer typically sticks around, and set the Bait's cost next to that number. Chapter 10 does that division on one of my own lists, and the answer came out to about \$55 a subscriber. Once you know your version of that number, the "can I afford to give away X" argument is over in about four seconds.

Compare that to the alternative, which is the default almost everybody runs. You pay for a click. The visitor reads for ninety seconds. They leave. Three weeks later they buy, from somebody, and you have no idea who, and you paid for the click anyway. Buying the address is the only part of that whole chain you get to keep.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Make the Bait do two jobs. Job one is always the address. Job two is a real step toward the sale: walk them into the store (the sandwich coupon), get the product in their hands (a free sample with shipping paid), get them to make the account they will need later (Sarah's dating profiles in Chapter 13), or teach them the thing that makes your product make sense. A twenty-dollar Amazon gift card drawing gets you addresses too, but it buys a crowd of people who want twenty dollars, not a crowd of people who want you. Bait with no second job fills a list with tourists.

## Where the Bait goes wrong

The way this fails is almost never “we picked the wrong guide.” It fails in three specific, boring ways I watched over and over.

The Bait is too good and attracts the wrong crowd. Give away an iPad and you will be amazed at your opt-in rate and horrified at your open rate sixty days later. The people who signed up wanted an iPad. They will never buy your thing, they will never open your emails, and now they are dragging your deliverability down (Chapter 17).

**The Bait is never delivered.** Somebody fills out the form, gets a confirmation, and the guide arrives four days later or not at all because a link broke and nobody checked. That is the single most expensive bug in email marketing and it is invisible, because the people it happens to do not complain, they just leave. Fill out your own form from a phone you do not own once a month.

The Bait has nothing to do with what you sell. A dental practice giving away a coffee-shop gift card is buying addresses from people who like coffee. Bait belongs in the same universe as the purchase.

## The token in 2026

The form is a QR code now, or a short keyword somebody texts, or a line printed at the bottom of the receipt. Use all of it. A phone camera opens the opt-in page in two seconds, which beats a pen, and the token comes back to the inbox and sits on the phone until the person is standing at the register with a tray, which beats a paper coupon in a junk drawer every time.

What has not changed is where the relationship lives. A phone number gets you 160 characters and a carrier who can decide you are spam. A follower on any platform is rented from an algorithm that will throttle your reach and then sell it back to you. **The address is the one channel you own**, it holds a full message with a button in it, and it still lands thirteen years after somebody typed it into a form to get a free sub.

The 2026 version of the sandwich token has one more requirement: tell the person what they are signing up for, in writing, on the form itself. “Weekly deals and one free sub” is a sentence, and it is also the difference between a subscriber and a complaint. Mailbox providers now count complaints against you as a matter of policy, so the honest form outperforms the sneaky one for a reason that has nothing to do with ethics and everything to do with plumbing.

Now most of you do not own a sandwich shop. You own a consulting practice, or a Shopify store, or a SaaS with a free tier, or a dental office, or nothing yet. So what is your bait, and, the part that is going to surprise you, does it really matter which one you pick?

## **Do this Monday**

- Write down what one customer spends with you in a year, multiply it by how many years they usually stay, and put that number at the top of a page. That is your budget for bait.
- Pick one piece of bait and name the second job it does. If you cannot name the second job, pick different bait.
- Put the opt-in form one tap from wherever people already find you, and make the thing they get redeemable where the money changes hands. A QR code on the receipt, a keyword by the register, a link on the thank-you page. Not buried in a footer.
- Fill out your own form on a phone, from a fresh address, and time how long the bait takes to arrive. Fix it if it is not instant.
- Write the one sentence that says what the person will get and how often, and put it under the form where they can read it before they type.

# Results, Not Benefits

Back in 2013, when I ran the PAR Program, we were running the Email Acquisition System for the dating vertical, and we offered three guides. A free “Complete Dating Guide.” Then “How To Spot a Fake Online Dating Profile.” Then “How To Seduce People Online.”

Read those three titles and pick the winner before you read the next line. Almost everybody picks the seduction guide. It is the one you would download at 11 at night with the lights off, and it feels like it should bury the other two.

Want to know a funny secret? No matter what we offered as the “guide”, we had about the same opt-in rate.

**Bottom line:** Any bait beats no bait, and which one you pick matters far less than you think. The words next to the form do the real work, and those words have to promise results (the hot date), never features (the fast car). Ship one guide this week and spend the time you saved on three bullets.

## Three guides, one number

The three dating guides landed in the same place. Not close enough to argue about. The same place.

That result ends the title argument before it starts. Ranking titles, testing subheads, building a fourth guide before the first three have shipped: all of that effort is aimed at a variable that does not move.

I am not going to hand you a percentage here. The 2013 white paper did not print one and I am not going to invent one thirteen years later to make a paragraph sound harder. What I can tell you is the shape, because the shape is what surprised us: three different promises, three different audiences inside the same niche, one opt-in rate.

Then we ran a version with no guide. Same page, same form, same button, no bait. Here is how I wrote it down in 2013, and I have not found a reason to soften it since: no matter what “it” ended up being, it was important to offer SOMETHING. When we did not have any sort of guide or special report the opt-in ratio drastically decreased.

## The barter

Think of it as a barter system. Some people guard their email addresses carefully. Other people make up fake ones just to use for online forms.

A form with nothing next to it is asking for a favor. A form with a guide next to it is offering a trade. Those are different transactions and they get different answers, and the person answering makes that call in under two seconds without ever thinking the word “trade.”

The people who type in junk addresses are not a bug. They are the sorting mechanism working. They wanted the guide, they did not want the relationship, and a fake address tells you that for free before you pay to mail them for six months. The confirmation email that separates the real addresses from the garbage is a machine problem and it gets handled in Chapter 17, Deliverability and List Hygiene.

What you control on this page is what you put on the other side of the counter. The address is the asset, which is the argument in Chapter 3, The Free Sandwich. The guide is what you pay for it. Pay something.

## Ship one this week

Pick the guide you can finish by Sunday and put it up.

The way this goes wrong is always the same, and I have done it myself. You decide the guide has to be good. Good turns into 40 pages. 40 pages turns into a designer. The designer turns into a revision round, and now it is five weeks later, your form still says “Join our newsletter,” and you have collected nothing while your competitor collected addresses with an ugly PDF.

Three honest ways to have bait by Friday:

- Write down the ten questions your customers actually ask before they buy, answer them in a page each, and title it after the question they ask most.
- Record six minutes of your screen doing the thing you are good at and hand over the video.
- Take something you already wrote and turn it into a checklist. A checklist is worth more to a stranger than an essay, because it can be used tonight.

If you sell insurance, “The 7 Things That Quietly Raise Your Premium” is a weekend of work and it is a better bait than a 60-page benefits explainer. If you run a gym, a one-page grocery list beats a nutrition manual. The bait is a door, not a monument.

None of these need a designer. In 2013 we shipped guides with zero design polish and the opt-in rate did not care. Since you now have a machine that will format a document for you in a minute, you have even less excuse than I had.

## The bait that eats your product

The other way this goes wrong is quieter, and it does not show up for a month.

You write the guide so complete that nobody needs you afterward. The gym hands over the grocery list, the workout plan, the macro calculator and a 30-day schedule, and the reader says thank you, closes the tab, and never books the consult. Four weekends of work and what you built is a reason not to buy from you.

Pick one problem and finish it. “The 7 Things That Quietly Raise Your Premium” tells a person exactly what is wrong with their policy and gives them no way to fix it alone. That is the correct amount of generous.

The tell that you sized it right: a reader finishes the guide and their next move is to reply to you. If their next move is to go do it themselves, cut the guide in half and keep the half that diagnoses.

## The car and the hot date

Please note how I said to list results, not benefits. There is a big difference and some marketers confuse the two.

A benefit would be that the car you are selling goes fast. The result would be that the fast car gets you a hot date. The absolute end result should be called out.

Run it as a ladder with three rungs, and do not stop until you fall off the top.

The feature is what is in the box: 400 horsepower, 22 pages, four coaching calls. The benefit is what the feature does: the car accelerates, you learn to spot fake profiles, you lose weight. The result is what your life looks like on the other side: someone is in the passenger seat, your Saturday night is not wasted on a guy who was never going to show, you look and feel better.

Most landing pages stop on rung two and think they are done. They are describing the car. I learned this selling extended warranties at Sears at 19, which is Chapter 10’s story: nobody wanted the paper, everybody wanted their Saturday back.

When it comes to guides, you want to offer it to the visitor for free, and you also want to call out 3 to 5 results that the visitor can expect to see if they read your guide. Put them on the page, the pop-up, the email submit form, wherever the field lives. **The bait needs to be enticing, but selling the results needs to seal the deal and lure them in.**

Here are some results off the top of my head:

- Find your soul mate
- Look and feel better
- Feel more confident
- Feel better about yourself
- Get peace of mind
- Enjoy life
- Feel secure

You could use just about any of those points as results on almost any landing page: insurance, dating, real estate, making money products, weight loss, and the list keeps going. Read it again and notice that not one line mentions a product, a feature, a price or a company.

Yes, this sounds cynical. Some people would call it manipulative to sell a term life policy on “get peace of mind” instead of on the payout table. Peace of mind is the actual reason a parent buys the policy. The payout table is the machinery that funds the promise, and nobody lies awake wanting machinery. Chapter 10 draws the line between persuasion and manipulation. The short version here is that persuasion helps a person make a decision they already want to make. Writing down the real reason they want it is not manipulation. It is accuracy. The one rule that keeps it accurate: the result you put on the form has to be something the product actually delivers.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Here is the tip, close to how it ran in the 2013 white paper.

*People NEVER buy products/services for what they do. They buy a product/service based on how they perceive it will enhance their life. This is why conveying the results in a concise, powerful bullet point list matters so much.*

## Writing your own

Start with the feature list you already have, the one on your product page, and put it in the left column of a piece of paper.

For each line, ask “so what” until the answer is something a person would admit to out loud at a bar. “Our guide covers 12 red flags in online profiles.” So what. “You can tell who is lying before you meet them.” So what. “You stop wasting Saturday nights.” That is the result. Write it in the right column and throw the left column away.

Then cut to three lines, four if one of them is genuinely doing different work. Five is where the list starts reading like a menu, and a menu invites comparison shopping instead of a sign up.

Write every line in second person, present tense, starting with a verb. “Find your soul mate” is four syllables and it lands. “Our comprehensive dating methodology helps users improve their matching outcomes” is the same claim with a tie on, and it converts like it sounds.

Four ways I have watched these lines die:

- **The company sentence.** “We have been helping families since 1998.” Nobody’s life improves in that sentence.
- **The disguised feature.** “Includes 12 red flags.” That is the box, not the outcome.
- **The adjective pile.** “Powerful, proven, comprehensive insights.” Delete every adjective and see if a claim is left. Usually there is not.
- **Five bullets that are one bullet.** Feel confident, feel better, feel great, feel amazing, feel secure. That is one line wearing five hats.

The test takes five minutes. Read your bullets to someone who does not know what you sell and ask them what they think they would get. If they describe your product, you wrote benefits. If they describe their own evening, you wrote results.

## Three bullets on a phone

Most people meet your form on a phone, in one hand, with a keyboard about to eat the bottom half of the screen. That is the real estate you are writing for.

On a phone-width form, a headline, three result bullets, one field and one button fit above the keyboard. Five bullets push the button under the fold, and a button under the fold is a button nobody presses. Cut to three. The two you cut were probably the same line twice anyway.

One field. Ask for the address and nothing else. Every extra box (first name, zip, phone) buys you a data point and costs you signups, and the persona work in the next few chapters gets you more personalization than a first-name field ever will.

The other thing that changed since 2013: a lot of the pages you are competing against are being written by the same handful of models, so they arrive at the same seven safe lines I listed above. Those lines still work, and they are still the floor. The edge now is going one rung past them into something a machine writing for a generic audience will not say, because it takes knowing an actual customer. “Enjoy life” is fine. “Stop dreading the mail” is better, and no model guessed it, because your customer told you that on the phone.

Now look at your form. It offers a guide, it promises three results, it has one field and a button. It also, whether you planned it or not, implies that a person wrote that guide, and in a minute that person is going to show up in an inbox and say hello. Who that person is, what they are called, and why anyone would trust them is the next problem, and it is the whole of Part III.

## **Do this Monday**

- Pick one bait you can finish by Sunday and write down its title. Do not open a second document to compare it against another title.
- Open your product page, list its features in a left column, and run “so what” on each one until you reach something a person would say at a bar.
- Cut the right column to three lines. Second person, present tense, verb first.
- Put those three lines next to your form, above the button, and delete every field except the email address.
- Load the page on your own phone with the keyboard open. If the button is not visible, cut a bullet, not the button.

## **PART III: THE PERSONA**

# The Persona

Open your phone right now and count sender names before you read a single subject line. Most of what is sitting there came from a company instead of a person. A shoe brand. A bank. A hosting company. A few of them signed “The Team,” which is a name the same way “Occupant” is a name.

Nobody has ever had a mentor named Acme Corp. Nobody forwards a logo’s email to a friend. Nobody opens a message at eleven at night because they want to hear what a brand has to say about anything.

**Bottom line:** Before you write one word of the Sequence, decide who it comes from. The Persona is one human being with a name, and the standard has two parts. You want to be a friend who gives them great advice. In addition to being their friend (and more importantly), you want to be their trusted mentor. Miss the who and all twenty days of copy you are about to write land on the reader as mail from a stranger.

## Start with the who

Here is the line from the 2013 white paper, and it is still the first move:

*When copywriting your email sequence you first want to think about the “who”.*

Typically the who already exists. It is the person you put on the landing page, the pop-up, or the email submit form where the reader handed over the address in Chapter 4. If a photo and a first name sold the guide, that photo and that first name send the email. If the form was blank and corporate, you are starting the relationship from zero on Day 1, which is a stupid place to start when the form was sitting right there.

**An email is a letter, and letters come from people.** That is the whole argument. Before the reader sees your copy, your offer, your button, or the guide they signed up for, the mailbox shows them two things: a sender name and a fragment of a subject line. On a phone that sender name is roughly the first twenty to twenty-five characters, in bold, above everything else. The reader sorts that line into a friend, a salesman, or a robot in less time than it takes to read this sentence, and the sort happens before your first word is read.

A company name gets sorted into robot almost every time. It is not because people hate companies. It is because a company cannot have been through what the reader is going through. A company was never broke at two in the morning doing the math on a credit card statement. A company never got stood up by someone who lied about being married. A company has a logo and a return policy, and neither of those has ever made anybody feel understood at eleven at night.

## Friend plus mentor

The Persona has to relate to your demographic, which means the Persona has to be a specific human with a specific past, not a pleasant voice.  
**Friend first, mentor second, and the mentor half is the one that sells.**

The friend half is what makes the email get opened. A friend writes in first person, says “I,” tells you when something is not worth buying, and admits the thing that did not work. A friend does not announce that they are excited to share an update with you.

The mentor half is what makes the recommendation land. A mentor has been standing where the reader is standing and got out of it, and can now say do this, then this, then this. A mentor gives instructions. That is the entire job.

Drop one half and the Sequence breaks in a way you can see in the numbers. Friend with no authority is a pen pal: nice emails, people reply, nobody buys, because you never earned the right to tell anyone what to do. Authority with no friendship is a professor, or worse, a rep: the first two emails get opened, the third does not, and by Day 11 you are in the promotions tab with the rest of the mail order.

The test I use on a draft is what the reader would type above it when they forward it to a friend. “This guy knows what he is talking about” means the Persona is working. “Thought this was funny” means you built a friend with nothing to teach. Nothing at all means you built a company.

## The nickname

Give the Persona a nickname. From the original: “It also works very well if they have a nickname. The nickname demonstrates social proof that this ‘persona’ has earned a title for their expertise in their niche area.”

**A nickname is a title the market gave them, not a job title they gave themselves.** That difference is the whole mechanism. “Senior Wellness Consultant” is something a company printed on a badge. “Titanium Abs” is something people started calling a guy because of what he could do. One of them is a claim about a position and the other is a claim about a result, and the reader can feel which is which without thinking about it.

The nickname also does a job that no subject line can do: it survives the inbox. It sits in the sender field on Day 1, and on every email after it, all the way to the Day 20 close. By the fifth or sixth one the reader knows exactly which sender in that mailbox you are without reading anything. A brand spends money on that kind of recognition. A nickname does it for free.

In 2013 I wrote this and it has gotten more true, not less: “You have probably seen the ‘guru’s’ online that have a nickname and this is why. It is a very powerful tool that builds immediate trust with your visitor.”

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Send yourself Email 1 right now and look at it on your phone at arm’s length, the way people actually read mail. If you cannot tell who it is from in the sender line, nothing else in the email matters. Keep the from-name short enough that it does not get cut off, which is about twenty-five characters including the nickname and the quote marks.

## **The six from 2013**

These are the six personas we were running at PAR Program when I wrote the white paper, exactly as they were printed, with the niche each one was built for:

- Weight Loss Workout Products: Michael “Titanium Abs” Thompson
- Weight Loss Supplements: Caroline “The Diet Coach” Monroe
- White Teeth: Sarah “White Lightning” James
- Debt Reduction: Robert “The Debt Bandit” Hawkins
- Coupon Sites: Jeff “The Real Deal” Jackson
- Dating sites: Anna “The Dating Guru” Starr

**Every one of those six was a character we built**, not an employee we photographed. PAR Program had twelve people on staff for most of its run, six in the office and six remote, on client accounts. Nobody on that staff was a teeth whitening expert named White Lightning. We wrote the name and we wrote the back story. The way I settle an argument about a name is the same way I settle every other argument in this book, which is to put it in front of live readers and shut up about my opinion until the numbers come back.

Look at what the six nicknames are doing. Titanium Abs and White Lightning name the result the reader wants, so the title is the promise. The Diet Coach, The Dating Guru and The Real Deal name a role the reader already understands, so the title is the shortcut. The Debt Bandit names an enemy, which is why it is my favorite of the six: debt is the thing in the reader's life that scares them, and the Persona is the guy who robs it.

What none of them do is get clever. There is no pun, no alliteration contest, no name that needs explaining. If you have to explain the nickname, cut it, because the reader is never going to hear the explanation.

Building a character raises an obvious question about honesty, and I am not going to pretend it does not. Chapter 7 is where I answer it, with the pseudonym I ran on my own site in 2002 and what happened when a phone company came after the name.

## Real people beat characters

If I were setting this up today, my first choice would not be Michael “Titanium Abs” Thompson.

**In 2026 the best persona is a real person on your team, under their real name.** The founder. The head of support. The person who actually reads replies. A constructed persona is the fallback, and it is a fallback for one reason: sometimes nobody at the company is willing to be the face, or the company runs eleven small sites in eleven niches and cannot staff a face for each one.

Three things changed since 2013 and they all push the same direction. People check. It takes eight seconds to search a name and see whether that person has a work history, a conference talk, a photo that appears anywhere except your landing page. Replies matter more than they used to, because mailbox providers watch engagement, and a real person who answers gets a lot more of it than a mailbox nobody monitors. And the writing itself is now cheap for everyone, so the only part of an email that is expensive to copy is the fact that a specific human is standing behind it.

A real name also comes with a cost you have to plan for. If Dana is the Persona and Dana leaves in March, you need a handoff email in the Sequence, written and sitting there, where Dana introduces the person taking over. That is a good email. It is honest, it is human, and it performs, because it is the kind of thing a friend would tell you.

The rule that covers both cases: a constructed persona is a stage name, never a disguise for a claim that is not true. A musician working under a stage name is fine. A fake doctor is fraud. The character can have a name you invented, a nickname the copy earned, and a back story built from things that actually happened to someone at your company. The character cannot have credentials nobody has, results nobody got, or testimonials nobody said. Chapter 9 covers where real testimonials come from, and the short version is that you ask for them.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** Every company on earth now has access to the same writing help, and you can tell. A lot of the mail in my inbox has the same rhythm, the same warm open, the same tidy bulleted middle, the same sign-off about being here to help. It reads like it was produced by the same person at forty different companies, and in a sense it was. That is good news for you. When every company voice has been sanded down to the same voice, one named human with a nickname and an opinion stands out harder in 2026 than it did in 2013. The bar for sounding like a person went down, so clearing it is worth more.

## One sender for twenty days

Pick the Persona and then do not touch it. **The same human sends all twenty days**, with the same name in the from-field, the same voice, and the same sign-off on every single email.

The way this breaks is boring and it happens constantly. Email 1 comes from Sarah. Email 2 comes from Sarah. Email 3 is a promotion that marketing sent through a different tool, so it comes from the company, in the company template, signed “The Team.” The reader does not think about it consciously. They just stop recognizing the sender, and the mailbox stops threading the mail together, and a sequence you spent two weeks writing gets treated like three unrelated senders who all want something.

Same problem, smaller version: the Persona signs off as Sarah on Day 2 and “Sarah James, Customer Experience Lead” on Day 7. Pick one. Mentors do not add their title halfway through a friendship.

Then there is no-reply@. Kill it. The Persona is a person, so the reply-to address has to reach a human being who will answer, and on Day 7 the whole sequence asks the reader for feedback, which is an awkward request to make from a mailbox that ignores them.

You now know who the emails come from and what they have to be. The next problem is smaller and stranger than it sounds, which is what to actually call them, because in 2013 I tested first names against each other on live lists and found out the name alone moves the numbers before anybody reads a word. Chapter 6 has the rules, the list of names that worked, and the one about strippers.

## Do this Monday

- Write the Persona on one index card: first name, last name, nickname, the niche, and the one sentence of back story that makes them a mentor instead of a stranger.
- Decide first whether a real person on your team will take the name. Ask them out loud. Fall back to a constructed persona only if the answer is no.
- Send yourself Email 1 and check the sender name on a phone at arm's length, then shorten the from-name until nothing gets cut off.
- Open every automated email your company currently sends and list the sender names. Every one that says Team, Marketing, Info or no-reply goes on a fix list.
- Set the reply-to address to a mailbox a person opens daily, and tell that person the Persona's name so they sign replies with it.
- Put the nickname through the explain test: if you have to explain it to a coworker, pick a plainer one that names the result your reader wants.

# Naming the Persona

Back in 2013 I wrote one line into the PAR Program white paper that I still get asked about: NEVER use a name that ends in Y or IE. If a stripper would use it, stay away. Avoid Jenny, Larry, Nicky, Melanie, Paulie, Destiny, Mercedes. It's the rule people remember most.

The reason it stuck is that it is a test anyone can run in under a second, on any name, without a spreadsheet. You do not have to understand a thing about copywriting to look at "Nicky" in a From line and know that Nicky is not going to be the one who tells you how to get out of \$60,000 of debt.

I was \$60k in debt once, so I have opinions about who I would have listened to.

**Bottom line:** The Persona is a person of authority, and the reader decides whether they believe that from the name alone, before the subject line and long before the first sentence. Three rules cover it. No name that ends in Y or IE. Always the long form. It has to sound like someone you would hand money to. Everything else about naming a persona is preference, and preference is not worth an argument.

## The stripper rule

The Y and IE endings are how English makes a thing small. Doggy. Cookie. Bobby. We hang those endings on kids, on pets, and on people we have known since the third grade, and that is exactly the social position those endings put your persona in.

That is fine for a friend at a barbecue. It is terrible for the person who is about to tell your reader what to do about their teeth, their weight, their credit report, or their dating profile. Use one of those names and **you will immediately establish a persona with a lower social value**, and the reader does not sit there and reason it out. They just read the email with less weight.

Mercedes is on the avoid list for a different reason. It is a car. Destiny is on the list because it is a name somebody picked for effect, and effect is the opposite of authority. Nobody named Destiny has ever sent me an invoice.

Run the rule on your short list before you fall in love with a name. Say the name, listen for the ending, and cut it if it lands soft.

The same rule kills a whole category of name that marketers keep reaching for, which is the name chosen to sound approachable. Nicky “The Coupon Queen” is approachable. She is also the seventh result down and nobody is upgrading their plan because Nicky said so. Approachable is what the nickname is for, and Chapter 5, The Persona, already gave the nickname that job. The legal-sounding first name and the playful nickname next to each other are the combination that works: Jeff “The Real Deal” Jackson does both jobs in four words.

**ShoeMoney Special Bonus Tip:** Your “persona” for your email list is a person of authority. It’s VERY important to choose a name that sounds professional.

## Always the long form

If the name you picked has a short version, always use the long version of the name. James not Jim. Robert not Bob. Donald not Don. Jennifer not Jenny or Jen. Elizabeth not Liz.

**The long form is the version an adult uses to sign a document.** The short form is the version their college roommate uses. You want the first one, because the Persona is going to be recommending things and asking for a credit card by Day 14 of the Sequence.

The long form has to be the same in five places. The display name field in the email platform. The sign-off at the bottom of every email. The byline next to the bait on the landing page or pop-up. The alt text or caption under the avatar photo. And the mailbox itself: robert@your-domain, not bob@yourdomain.

A reader who opts in on a page that says Robert Hawkins and then gets an email signed Bob has just been told, quietly, that nobody is actually there. That is a small leak and it never shows up in your open rate. It shows up as silence.

The way it usually leaks is the reply. A subscriber answers Robert with a question, and the reply bounces because the only mailbox anybody actually built was bob@yourdomain, or it lands in a shared inbox that stamps “Support Team” on the way out. Send yourself a test, hit reply from your phone, and read the whole round trip: display name, sign-off, reply-to address, and whatever your platform sticks in the footer.

The reader will shorten the name on their own, in their head, which is what you want. Let them do it. Do not do it for them.

## The names that won

Here are the time-tested first names that we have had success with.

Males:

- Robert
- Jeff
- Michael (top performer)
- David
- Frank
- Nicholas

Females:

- Jennifer
- Nicole
- Sarah (top performer)
- Anna
- Alice
- Rebecca
- Elizabeth

**Michael and Sarah beat everything else we put against them.** Michael carried the weight-loss workout persona, Michael “Titanium Abs” Thompson, and Sarah carried the white teeth persona, Sarah “White Lightning” James. Both of those were the first names I reached for whenever I had no other information about an audience.

Now the honest part, because you are reading this in 2026 and I am not going to hand you a list and pretend it is science. That is not a study. There is no control group, no published methodology, and no peer review anywhere near it. It is what happened across campaigns I ran on my own sites and then at PAR Program, in the verticals we were in at the time, against the people who were on those lists. Weight loss, dating, debt, white teeth, coupons. Nothing else.

So treat the list as a starting deck, not as an answer. If you are selling industrial pumps to plant managers in Ohio, my dating-list winners have told you nothing. What the list is good for is skipping the first forty candidate names so you can get to a test faster.

Test it like this. Same bait, same landing page copy, same sequence, two display names. Split your traffic and run both. Judge on opt-ins first, then on replies to the Day 7 poll email in Chapter 9, Engagement, because replies are the number that tells you whether anybody believes a person is on the other end. Rule of thumb I use: do not call it until each arm has a few hundred opt-ins, because name tests move small and a hundred people will happily lie to you.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** If you have not seen the movie Freakonomics, or read the book, I highly recommend it. There is a section on names and what they can do to a kid's outcomes. It is a small piece of the movie and the rest of it is worth your time anyway if you sell things for a living.

## Say it out loud

The third rule has no clean test, so here is the messy one: say the full name out loud and ask whether you would hand that person money.

Jeff Jackson. Sarah James. Anna Starr. Robert Hawkins. Those are the pseudonyms the white paper listed, and every one of them clears in under a second.

The last name does more work than people expect. Keep it to one or two syllables. No hyphen. No spelling anybody has to ask about, because your persona's name is going to get typed into a search box by a subscriber checking whether the person is real, and a name that gets misspelled comes back empty. And check that the pair does not belong to somebody famous, a competitor's founder, or a person already working at your company. That collision alone is reason enough to start over.

Watch the initials too. Say the two letters out loud and then look at what they spell, because somebody on the internet will do that within a week of your first send and they will do it in a reply you have to answer.

One more check before you commit: you have to be able to answer to it. If the name makes you cringe when you type it into the sign-off at 11 at night, that discomfort gets into the writing. Chapter 7, ShoeMoney On The Cut, gets into that properly.

## What changed by 2026

The rules held. The display surface got smaller and meaner.

On a phone, the From line is the biggest text in the inbox row and the subject line sits underneath it in grey. Most clients give the sender name somewhere around twenty to twenty-five characters before the rest is cut, so **the first name is often the entire thing the reader sees**. Robert Hawkins fits. Robert Hawkins from the Debt Reduction Team does not, and gets chopped into something that looks broken.

Many inboxes also draw a circle with the first letter of the sender name in it, or the avatar you set on the sending account. Set that avatar to a photo of a person. An empty circle with an R in it is a company, and nobody has ever had a mentor who was a company.

Open tracking does not answer the name question any more either. Apple's mail privacy changes fire the tracking pixel on a pile of messages nobody opened, so a name test judged on open rate now measures Apple. Judge on the click, the opt-in, and the reply. Those still belong to a human.

The name does nothing for inbox placement. That is SPF, DKIM, DMARC, a warmed sending domain, and a list that is not full of dead addresses, and Chapter 17 is where that lives. What the name controls is what happens in the half second after you land.

The other change works in your favor. A large share of commercial email now gets drafted by a machine, and it all sounds the same: even, polite, evenly spaced, no edges. A From line with a real human first name in its long form, a last name that scans, and a nickname the market gave them stands further out in 2026 than it did in 2013, because the wall behind it got flatter.

## Break it for the audience

There is one exception and I broke the long-form rule myself, on purpose, on the most profitable site I ever owned.

NextPimp's audience did not want a Michael. They wanted a Mike, so the persona was Mike Lowery, short form and all. The audience outranks the rule. It outranks every rule in this book.

That decision, and what happened when Nextel's lawyers eventually went looking for a Mike Lowery, is Chapter 7. So is the bigger question sitting underneath this whole chapter, which the rules do not touch: whether you should be using a made-up name at all.

## Do this Monday

- Write down five candidate names for your persona, first and last, and read each one out loud before you look at it.

- Cut every candidate that ends in Y or IE, and expand every short form to its long form.
- Search each surviving name for a famous person, a competitor's founder, and anyone on your own payroll. Cut any collisions.
- Set the winner in all five places at once: platform display name, email sign-off, landing page byline, avatar caption, and the reply-to mailbox.
- Put a real photo of a person on the sending account so the inbox does not draw a grey circle with a letter in it.
- Open your platform and set up a two-arm split on the display name, then leave it alone until each arm has a few hundred opt-ins.

# ShoeMoney On The Cut

I have given about 55 conference talks, and after almost every one of them somebody finds me at the bar and asks where the name ShoeMoney came from. They are grinning before I answer. They want a heist story, or a handle off a bulletin board in 1994, or a bet I won.

It was a pizza shop. I was 16. A polyester work shirt named me, and I have been answering to it ever since, on stage, on a book cover, and in the From line of every email I have sent for twenty years.

I did not pick a single letter of it.

**Bottom line:** A sender name has three jobs. It has to be easy to say, it has to mean something to the people receiving it, and it has to feel right to the person typing it at eleven at night. A made-up name is allowed and always has been. A made-up claim is not. Settle the name before you write email one, because on a phone the sender name is read before the subject line, and the subject line is read before anything you actually wrote.

## The name on the shirt

The best names get handed to you by the people already using them. Mine got handed to me by a guy running a schedule board at a pizza place.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** I wish I had a cool story about how my nickname “ShoeMoney” came about. When I was 16 years old I was working at a pizza joint on the “cut table”. When pizzas came out of the oven it was my job to slice them up. I was really good at this, so whenever I worked they would assign me to be “on the cut”. While working we also listened to rap music. So, with me being “On the cut”, my last name of Schoemaker, and the rap music, one day I came into work to get a new work shirt and discovered that it was embroidered Jeremy Schoemaker “ShoeMoney On The Cut”. And that’s where ShoeMoney came from.

Nobody at that shop was doing brand work. They were making a joke on an embroidery order. But the joke did things I could not have planned at 16 and could not reproduce on purpose today.

It was two syllables and a hard stop. You could repeat it after hearing it once and spell it after seeing it once. It carried a joke, so people said it to other people, which is the only distribution that has ever been free. And it had the word money sitting inside it, which turned out to be the exact thing strangers would later come to me for.

**A nickname the market gives you is evidence**, which is why Chapter 5, The Persona, puts a nickname on every persona in the book. Michael “Titanium Abs” Thompson did not name himself that in the story you are telling. Somebody else did, because he earned it. That is the whole trick of the nickname, and it falls apart the second the name sounds like it was chosen in a meeting.

So before you go build a name from scratch, go look at what your customers already call you, your product, or your founder in the support inbox. If there is a name in there, take it. It cost you nothing and it already passed a test no focus group can run.

## Say it out loud

The test for a name is spoken, not written. Nobody sounds out a logo.

The pseudonym should be easy to pronounce and should roll off the tongue and be memorable to your audience. That last part is the key. It has to relate to your audience.

**Say the name into a voicemail** you leave for yourself, then play it back the next morning. If you stumble on it, so will everybody else, and stumbling is not neutral. A name a reader cannot say is a name a reader cannot recommend, and word of mouth is the only channel in this book that does not have a deliverability problem.

Then run the spelling test. Say the name to a friend on the phone and ask them to type it. If they ask you how to spell it, you have added a step between your persona and every person who ever tries to look you up. Caroline Monroe survives that call. Katherine Beaulieu-Marchetti does not.

Then check what the name looks like on a phone. Mail apps show the sender’s display name in a narrow column, and that column truncates somewhere around twenty characters depending on the device and the font size. “Sarah James” fits in every inbox on earth. “Sarah James, Senior Wellness Content Lead” arrives as “Sarah James, Senio” and reads like a company, which is the one thing Chapter 5 told you not to be.

Last, lock it. The display name in the From field, the name in the sign-off, and the name on the reply that comes back from your support address all have to be the same string of characters for the entire Sequence. When they drift, the reader does not consciously notice. They just feel that something is off, and they stop opening.

## Mike Lowery

Audience research picks the name. You do not, and neither does your creative director.

In 2002, I built a site called NextPimp, “Pimp Out Your Nextel Phone”. It went on to outgrow Nextel and become the largest mobile community in the world with over 750,000 members. I sold this site in 2009 to an affiliate network because I had a huge database of people interested in the mobile space, particularly ringtones.

That is also the site that produced the check people know me for: \$132,994.97 in a single month of Google AdSense in August 2005. Chapter 8 tells that story properly. I bring the site up here because of what I had to do before any of it worked, which was pick a name to talk to those people under.

The demographic for NextPimp was largely African American males and females ages 18 to 30. So I did some research on the most common names for that specific demographic. I chose the name Mike Lowery, used an African American avatar and persona, and put him in front of every piece of communication the site sent.

Now yes, Mike is the short form of Michael, and Chapter 6, Naming the Persona, says always use the long form. **Mike resonated better with my demographic, so the rule lost.** I was also playing off the name recognition of a major character in the movie Bad Boys, which let my audience relate to me right away, before they read a word about who I was or why I was in their inbox.

That is the exception worth understanding, because it is the only one I make. The name lists in Chapter 6 are defaults. They come from my own campaigns, they held up across a lot of sends, and they are where you start when you have no information. The moment you have actual information about the people receiving the mail, the information beats the default. I did not test my way to Mike. I looked at who was on the site and picked the name they were already surrounded by.

The pseudonym also collected a cease-and-desist. Nextel sent it in June 2005, addressed to Mike Lowery rather than to me. The letter itself no longer resolves anywhere online, and the footnote citing it has outlasted it: Lemley and McKenna’s “Irrelevant Confusion” in the Stanford Law Review lists it among specious trademark objections, next to a pork board going after a breastfeeding site. We won it, and my account of why is simple. The only people on the planet connecting the two names were Nextel’s own retail staff, who were using the site to move handsets off their own shelves.

Here are some of the pseudonyms we used:

- Michael Lowery
- Caroline Monroe
- Sarah James

- Robert Hawkins
- Jeff Jackson
- Anna Starr

Again, notice how they all just roll off the tongue? Not one of them needs spelling on a phone call, and not one of them has a cluster of consonants you have to slow down for.

## Do the research first

Naming research takes an afternoon and you do it before you buy a domain, not after.

Start in your own records. Pull a couple hundred customer names out of your order table or your CRM export and read the first names as a list. You are not looking for the most common name so you can copy it. You are looking for the era and the register your customers live in, because a list full of Debbies and a list full of Kaylees want to hear from different senders.

Then read your support inbox for an hour with a notepad open. Write down how people sign off, what they call your product, and what words they use for their own problem. Chapter 11, Pain, is going to make you do this again for the copy, so you may as well collect both passes at once.

Then find who that audience already trusts and see whether any of that recognition is borrowable without being a lie. Bad Boys did that for Mike Lowery. A name that already lives in your reader's head arrives pre-warmed, and the cost of borrowing it is zero as long as you are not claiming to be the person.

Then say your three or four finalists out loud to somebody who is actually in the audience. Not your designer. Not the person who signs the invoices. Somebody who would receive the email. Ask which one sounds like a person who would help them and which one sounds like a pitch.

Then search the finalist. If a real coach with that exact name sells the same thing you sell in the same niche, drop it and take the next one on your list. You do not want your persona's name pulling up somebody else's face, and you really do not want their lawyer.

What goes wrong is almost always the same thing: somebody names the persona for themselves instead of for the reader. The name sounds expensive, or literary, or like the founder's grandmother, and it tests fine inside the building because everybody inside the building already knows what the company does. In 2026 you can also get fifty candidate names generated for you in three seconds, and they will all sound like a skincare brand. The list is free. The afternoon of research is the part that is worth something, and no tool does it for you.

## If it feels wrong

Your pseudonym needs to be something that you feel comfortable with. If the name does not feel right, it will be subconsciously communicated to the reader. So pick a good one.

That sounds soft. It is not. **You have to answer to this name**, in writing, hundreds of times, for years. You will type “Talk soon, Sarah” at the bottom of an email at eleven at night, and you will answer a reply from a guy named Jim who tells you something real about his divorce, and you will sign that one Sarah too. If any part of that makes you flinch, the flinch shows up in the copy as hedging, shorter sentences, and a sign-off that reads like it was pasted in.

The staffing question is the same question. Whoever writes the Sequence and whoever answers the replies both have to be able to hold the voice. If three people on your team are going to write as Sarah, they need one page that says how Sarah talks, or the persona develops a split personality by Day 11 and your subscribers feel it before they can name it. If you cannot staff that, use a real person on your team under their real name and put their real face on it. That is the better answer in 2026 anyway, and Chapter 5 already made the case for it.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Before you register anything, write one complete email, sign it with the name, and read it out loud in that person’s voice. If you cringe at the sign-off, change the name, not the email. Changing a name after four thousand people already have it is a re-brand, and you will pay for it in open rates for a month.

## Where a pen name breaks

A pen name is fine. Writers have published under invented names for as long as there have been publishers, nobody thinks Mark Twain was running a con, and a From line is a byline.

**The name can be invented. The claims cannot.** Everything the persona says has to be true of the business standing behind it. If Sarah says her guide has helped a lot of people, a lot of people have to have been helped by the guide. If she quotes a subscriber named Jenny, Jenny has to be a real subscriber who really wrote that, which is exactly why Chapter 9, Engagement, spends a whole chapter on the poll that produces real testimonials from real people instead of invented ones.

The moment an invented name is attached to a claim you cannot back up, you are not writing marketing. You are lying to a stranger for money, and the pen name is now the part that makes it worse rather than the part that makes it clever. I am saying that once and moving on.

There is a legal floor under all of this in 2026 and it is not hard to clear. Header information cannot disguise who actually sent the mail, the footer carries a real mailing address for the business, and unsubscribe has to work in one click and take effect fast. A display name of “Sarah James” over a sending domain you own, with your company’s address at the bottom, clears every one of those. A persona invented to keep anyone from finding out who sent the mail does not, and mailbox providers are better at spotting that than any regulator.

Your persona has a name now, and a name buys you exactly one opened email. What gets the second one opened is a story, and there is one story shape that has worked for me more reliably than anything else I own. I did not invent it either. I fell into it at 420 pounds with \$60,000 of debt and a phone call from Google.

## **Do this Monday**

- Read an hour of your support inbox and write down every first name, sign-off, and phrase customers use for their own problem.
- Pick four candidate names using the Chapter 6 lists as your starting point, then throw out any that your audience research contradicts.
- Say all four into a voicemail, play it back the next morning, and cut the ones you stumbled on.
- Search each survivor and drop any name that belongs to a real person selling something similar.
- Write one full email in the persona’s voice, sign it, read it out loud, and pick the name you did not cringe at.
- Set that exact name as the display name on your sending address and in every sign-off in the Sequence, and do not change it again.

# The Reluctant Hero

I was 420lbs, smoked 2 packs of cigarettes a day, and was \$60k in debt. That is not a humble opener I workshopped for a stage. That is the actual inventory of my life the year everything turned, and one reason ShoeMoney.com has been such a tremendous success is “the story.” The story did the selling. I was just the guy standing in it.

Then one day, Google called me out of the blue and BAM. Within one month one of my websites was pulling in six figures in profits from Google. The site was NextPimp, the one from Chapter 7. The check was \$132,994.97 and the month was August 2005. Slate wrote about that check on October 1, 2008, and people still bring it up to me.

**Bottom line:** A persona sells on its back story, and the back story only works when it starts in a ditch, turns on something the Persona did not engineer, and ends with other people doing the bragging. Then the Persona shrugs it off in public. That shrug is the most reliable sales device I own, and the student email in this chapter is how you run it on a list ten times without the list ever feeling sold to.

## I kind of fell into it

Before I knew it, Google made me famous by having me speak on panels around the world about how I made money. A guy who could barely get around was now getting flown to conferences to explain ad revenue. Life completely flipped around. A true rags-to-riches story.

By sharing my success story, people started to tell me that I inspired them to do great things. The guy who started icanhazcheezburger (the silly cat site with pictures) came up to me and said I was his inspiration. Perez Hilton told me that when he saw my AdSense check picture in 2005, I was his inspiration to start blogging. And the list goes on and on.

I never meant to be a hero to these guys, but I was.

Now, I would like to tell you I was smart enough to orchestrate what happened, but the fact of the matter is, that’s not true. **I kind of fell into it.** I did not have a persona strategy in 2005. I had a check and a story I had not figured out how to use yet.

What I did have, afterward, was years to look at the wreckage and figure out which part of it made people buy. When I started PAR Program in 2012 and we began building sequences for clients selling sandwiches and electronic cigarettes, we put that same shape into their emails on purpose. It is three pieces. It works for a real founder and it works for a pen name.

## Ditch, turn, thanks

Your persona needs a ditch, a turn, and people who now say thank you. Write those three things down before you write a single email, because every email in the Sequence is going to borrow a line from them.

**The ditch has to carry a number.** 420 pounds is a ditch. Two packs a day is a ditch. \$60,000 in debt is a ditch. “I struggled for years” is a guy clearing his throat. If Robert “The Debt Bandit” Hawkins is your persona, he never opens with “I understand financial hardship.” He opens with how many cards he was paying the minimum on and what the total was that month. If Caroline “The Diet Coach” Monroe is your persona, she does not say she had a weight problem, she says what the scale read the last day she was willing to look at it. A ditch with no number and no object in it is not a ditch, it is an adjective.

The turn is the part everybody writes wrong. Most people make the persona the genius of their own turn: I studied the market, I built a system, I cracked the code. That version is a brag with a beginning. The turn that sells is the one the Persona did not control. A phone call. A guy at a bar. A pamphlet in a waiting room. Mine was Google dialing my number, which is why I have told that story for years and never gotten tired of it. Nobody resents luck. Everybody resents a genius.

The thanks are where the money is, and the thanks cannot come from you. Sarah “White Lightning” James never tells the list her whitening routine is excellent. She tells the list what a customer wrote her after a wedding, and quotes it. Anna “The Dating Guru” Starr never says her guide works. She forwards the note somebody sent her about a third date. The Persona does not grade their own work. Other people grade it, and the Persona repeats the grade while looking slightly embarrassed about it.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** The single most valuable marketing asset I ever made took almost no effort. I held up the AdSense check for \$132,994.97 and took a picture of it. That photo has done more marketing work for me than anything I have paid for since. It is one object, from one bad year, that proves the whole turn. Find your persona’s object. A before photo, a payoff letter, a rejection email, a screenshot of a bank balance with two digits in it. One picture of the ditch is worth about six paragraphs of describing it.

## The student email

Here is the template. This one is written for a dating persona and the last line is an affiliate link, which is how we ran it in 2013. Read it once straight through before you read my notes.

*Yesterday I heard from one of my students. She said that by simply following my step-by-step guide on “X” site, it made all her dreams come true. She went on to give me a lot of accolades that made me feel a bit uncomfortable.*

*This happens to me a lot and I want to be honest with you... the real secret is that she took action.*

*Taking action is 99% of this. My guide is 1%. Anyone can follow the step-by-step no-fail system I have come up with but unfortunately 99% of people are too lazy to do it. So I personally cannot take credit for it.*

*I have created this free guide, and if you just take action, it works. So if you have not already, go here, make your profile and follow my guide:*

*----> [Yourlinkhere.com/?affiliateid=something](http://Yourlinkhere.com/?affiliateid=something)*

*Anna*

Boom. See how powerful that is, and how slick I was. **We are pointing out how awesome we are AND we are giving them ANOTHER call to action**

to go finish the job so we get paid. Let's take it apart line by line.

- “Yesterday I heard from one of my students.” Yesterday gives it a date, so it reads as news instead of a testimonial page. “One of my students” quietly says there are others. Two facts, nine words, zero bragging.
- “She said that by simply following my step-by-step guide on ‘X’ site, it made all her dreams come true.” The biggest claim in the email is in somebody else’s mouth. The Persona never once says the guide works. A stranger says it.
- “She went on to give me a lot of accolades that made me feel a bit uncomfortable.” This is the whole device in one sentence. The praise is reported and then flinched at. Discomfort is what separates a reluctant hero from a guy with a podcast.
- “This happens to me a lot.” That is a volume claim wearing a modesty costume. It does the work of a page of case studies and takes five words.
- “I want to be honest with you... the real secret is that she took action.” Now the Persona is on the reader’s side of the table, letting them in on something.
- “Taking action is 99% of this. My guide is 1%.” Refusing the credit raises the price of the guide. Every reader who has bought a course and left it in a tab knows this line is aimed at them, and they agree with it before they notice it is a setup.

- “Unfortunately 99% of people are too lazy to do it.” That is a dare. Nobody reading an email at 11pm about fixing their life wants to be in the 99%.
- “So I personally cannot take credit for it.” Aw shucks. Anyone would have done the same.
- “Go here, make your profile and follow my guide: Yourlinkhere.com/?affiliateid=something.” The second call to action, which is the one that pays. It arrives as the only sensible response to everything above it, not as a pitch, because the whole email has been about someone else.

Run this email a dozen different ways with a dozen different students. The structure does not wear out because the reader is never being sold, they are being told about somebody else’s week.

## Why the shrug works

People LOVE reluctant heroes. Nothing makes a guy rise to stardom more than saying, “Aw shucks, anyone would have helped you in my position.”

Remember Sully Sullenberger, the pilot who landed US Airways flight 1549 in the Hudson River in January 2009. In 2013 I wrote that his story stormed the country and anything that guy ever sells will be a huge success. I would still bet on it in 2026, though I have not gone and checked his sales numbers. The part worth copying is what the public saw: a guy who kept pointing at the crew and the checklist instead of at himself, and a country that handed him the credit anyway.

There are four Internet blogger personalities who ran this on purpose and ran it well. Chris Brogan at [chrisbrogan.com](http://chrisbrogan.com), Brian Clark at [copyblogger.com](http://copyblogger.com), Darren Rowse at [problogger.net](http://problogger.net), and Aaron Wall at [seobook.com](http://seobook.com). Every single one of these guys plays the reluctant hero card. In 2013 I wrote that it was no coincidence they were all millionaires. I will say it more carefully in 2026: all of them did very well, and the pattern under it is the same one. They had people praising them constantly for all the value they gave others, and they loved to publicize it. Reluctantly, of course.

This matters more now than it did when I first wrote it. In 2026 every inbox gets a pile of mail with an origin story in it, and a lot of it is written by a machine that has read a million origin stories and averaged them. Those emails all have the arc. None of them have the 420. A model will happily write “I was struggling and then I discovered a system,” and it will never write the two packs a day, the specific check, the specific call, or the flinch. **Specific and slightly embarrassing is now the hardest thing in email to fake.**

## The part that has to be true

ALWAYS, ALWAYS remember to point out how awesome your persona is and how they are helping people. And every word of it has to be true.

I do not mean the Persona has to be a real named human with a driver's license. Chapter 7, *ShoeMoney On The Cut*, covered that: a pen name in a From line is as old as publishing. I mean the claims underneath the name have to be things the business behind it actually did. If your guide has never made anybody's dreams come true, you do not get to send the student email yet. Go get somebody a result first, then send it.

The thanks especially. Whatever you do, do not make it up. Invented testimonials are the fastest way to torch a list. Somebody always knows. The reluctant hero device only works because the praise is real and the Persona is the one person not impressed by it, and a fabricated quote takes both halves of that away at once.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Start a file today called thanks.txt and paste every single nice thing anybody has said about your business into it, with the date and the first name. Support replies, tweets, the two lines somebody wrote at the bottom of a survey. Most people lose most of their proof because it arrives on a Tuesday when they are busy. That file is where every student email you write from now on comes from.

Which leaves the obvious problem: a brand-new persona with a brand-new list has an empty thanks.txt. You cannot repeat praise nobody has given you. So you go ask for it, and the asking is its own email with its own rules, which is Chapter 9, Engagement.

## Do this Monday

- Write your persona's ditch in one sentence with a number or an object in it. If you cannot put a number in it, keep digging.
- Write the turn in one sentence and check that the Persona is not the genius of it. Somebody or something else has to move first.
- Create thanks.txt and spend twenty minutes filling it from your inbox, your support queue, and your social replies. Dates and first names only.
- Draft the student email from the template above, using a real person from thanks.txt, with your actual product link as the last line.
- Read the draft out loud and delete every line where your persona compliments your persona. If the email still brags after that, you are missing a student, not a sentence.
- Check every factual claim in the back story against what actually happened, and cut the ones you cannot back up before the email goes anywhere near a send button.

# Engagement

Picture a three-email run for a dating persona. The first two are finished. The third one, the email that does the actual selling, has a hole in it about a third of the way down where a person's words go. Not a claim about the product. A person, with a first name, saying a specific thing that happened to them.

The fastest way to fill that hole is to make it up. It takes about ninety seconds, nobody can prove it did not happen, and the copy comes out cleaner than anything a real customer would ever write.

Whatever you do, DO NOT MAKE IT UP! It has to come from real people!

**Bottom line:** You get real testimonials by asking your list for feedback, and you get them at a rate that will surprise you by asking for the bad along with the good. The feedback request is the cheapest email in the whole Sequence. It sells nothing, it costs you one link, and it hands you the ammunition for every Proof email you write after it.

## Do not make it up

A fake testimonial is the one shortcut in this book that I will not let you take, and not because I am precious about it. **A made-up quote is always the weakest line in the email.** Written testimonials from actual humans are lumpy. They start in the middle. They use the wrong word for your product. They drop a detail that has nothing to do with anything. Here is one I am inventing on the spot so you can see the shape: somebody tells you they got through Chapter 3 in a folding chair at their kid's swim practice.

You cannot write that. I cannot write that. What we write instead is "This guide changed everything for me! I would recommend it to anyone!" with an exclamation point and a first name and a last initial, and every reader who has ever bought anything online has been trained to slide right past it.

This got worse in 2026, and the reason is not moral. Fabricated praise is now free and instant to generate in bulk, so the generic testimonial has been devalued to zero. The lumpy ones are the only ones left with any weight, and they are also the ones you cannot fake at scale. The Jenny line I use as a made-up example in Chapter 13, "I just totally busted out 3 guys, two for being married and one for not using their real picture," works for that reason. Nobody sitting down to fake a testimonial arrives at three guys split two ways.

There is a legal layer now too, which I will put in one paragraph and leave alone. There is real regulatory attention on fake consumer reviews and made-up testimonials in the United States now, enough that you should check the current guidance before you cut this corner. I am not a lawyer and this is not legal advice. I am telling you that the ninety-second shortcut now has a downside that did not exist when I wrote this guide.

## The cheapest sales email you will send

The feedback email is a sales email that sells nothing, which is exactly why it works. **It asks for two minutes instead of a credit card**, and it lands in the middle of a Sequence where every other email is either giving something away or asking for money.

Engaging with your subscribers does some extraordinary things:

1. It continues the conversation with them.
2. It makes them feel important and powerful.
3. It gives you a great, real testimonial about how awesome you are!
4. It is more social proof that people are having success with your advice (while you are also profiting).

Number two is the one people skip past, and it is the engine. Almost nobody who sells a thing ever asks the buyer what they thought. If you have ever gotten a survey link from a company whose product you bought, you know it came from a system, addressed to nobody, scored on a scale of zero to ten. A note from a named human who says they noticed you specifically have not written back is a different object entirely.

Number four is the business case. The Proof email in Chapter 13 needs a person, and this email is where that person comes from. Every quote you collect on Day 7 is a line you get to use for the next two years, in the Sequence, on the opt-in page next to the Bait, and in the launch emails you have not written yet.

## The Hi Sam email

Here is the whole thing, the way we sent it:

*Hi Sam, I have been getting all sorts of great feedback from users about how they are doing with my step-by-step guide, but I have not heard from you yet!*

*I REALLY value your feedback and if you have even 5 minutes I would like it if you would fill out this survey here.*

*==> [Yourlinkhere.com/?affiliateid=something](#)*

*Now, on the survey you will notice there is a section where I ask you to tell me your favorite thing along with something you don't like. I encourage you to be honest and please try to think of something. This is what REALLY helps me improve my free guide!*

Take it apart, because every line is doing a job.

“**but I have not heard from you yet**” is the whole email in six words. It says other people are writing in, which is social proof buried inside a request instead of announced. It says the sender noticed this particular person’s silence, which is not true of a broadcast and is true enough of a persona reading a reply folder. And it puts a tiny, friendly debt on the reader: somebody gave you a free thing and has been waiting to hear what you thought.

“if you have even 5 minutes” pre-negotiates the objection before the reader gets there. Nobody is deciding whether your survey is worth doing. They are deciding whether it is worth doing right now, in the eleven seconds they are giving your email, and five minutes is a number small enough to say yes to. In 2026 I would cut it to two, because the form I am about to describe genuinely takes two.

The link gets its own line with the arrows, because it is the only link in the email. That placeholder has an affiliate id sitting in it, which is how we tagged every outbound link in 2013. Today the same slot holds a tracking tag so the click shows up when you measure the Sequence in Chapter 21.

Sign it with your persona’s name, the same name on the Bait and every other email in the run. The From line and the signature never change once the Sequence starts.

**Super ShoeMoney tip!** Notice how disarming that is. All we really want is to get a testimonial about how awesome the guide is, but by pointing out that we also want negative feedback too, it totally disarms people. It instantly takes away the “I smell a rat” factor. Winning!

That last move is the part people leave out when they copy this email, and it is the part that makes the rest of it work. **Ask for the bad on purpose.** “I encourage you to be honest and please try to think of something” gives permission and assigns a small task at the same time. What comes back is a paragraph of praise followed by “the only thing I didn’t like was that the videos wouldn’t play on my phone.” You just got a testimonial and a bug report in the same submission, from somebody who now feels like a collaborator instead of a name on a list.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** Every restaurant in America puts a comment card on the table and nobody fills it out. The places that actually learn something send a manager over to ask one question out loud: what is the one thing we could have done better tonight. Same information, same customer, completely different response rate. Your survey is the comment card. The Hi Sam email is the manager walking over.

## Where it sits in the Sequence

Day 7, and the day matters. **It goes out after they have had a week to use the Bait** and before the Gift days start on Day 14.

The run around it looks like this. Day 1 is the double opt-in confirmation that delivers the Bait. Day 2 and Day 4 are value plus a recommendation. Day 7 is the poll. Day 11 is the poll results, the thanks, and a bonus offer. Then the Gift days in Chapter 19.

Day 7 works because by then the subscriber has either used the thing or definitively not used it, and both answers are useful to you. Send the poll on Day 2 and you are asking for an opinion nobody has formed yet. Send it on Day 20 and you are asking a stranger, because the two emails of value you sent have faded and the relationship is cold again.

Day 11 is not optional and it is the half everybody drops. You promised the feedback mattered, so four days later you send the results: here is what people said, here is what I am fixing, thank you, and by the way here is a bonus for the people who wrote in. If the feedback goes into a hole and nothing ever comes back out, you have trained your list that writing to you is a waste of time, and the next thing you ask them for gets a worse response than this one did.

## The 2026 version of the survey

The email barely changes. The form behind the link changes a lot.

**Build a one-question form.** One open text box, no scale, no demographics, no dropdown for how they heard about you. The question is “What was the most useful thing in the guide, and what is one thing you did not like?” A fourteen-question survey gets you a completion rate in the basement and a spreadsheet of numbers you will never open. One box gets you sentences, and sentences are the only thing you can quote.

Offer the reply as an alternative in the same breath: “or just hit reply and tell me, that works too.” Some people will never click a link from an email and will happily type three lines back to a human. Replies are also one of the strongest positive signals a mailbox provider can see from your address, so the people who answer that way are quietly improving your delivery into everybody else’s inbox. Make sure the From address actually receives mail. A persona sending from a no-reply address is a persona that just told the reader it is a robot.

Ask for permission to quote, on the form, right under the box. A checkbox that says “You can use what I wrote, with my first name” and a blank for the first name. Store the checkbox with the answer, with the date it came in. Two years from now, when a quote from this batch is sitting on your opt-in page, you want a record that says which human said it and that they said yes.

Then leave the words alone. Fix a misspelling if it is distracting, cut the middle of a long one with an ellipsis, and change nothing else. The sentence that reads a little awkwardly is the sentence a reader believes.

You now have the Bait, the Persona, the story, and a file of real quotes. Part IV is the sales email itself, and it starts on an appliance floor at Sears.

## Do this Monday

- Write your Day 7 feedback email from the Hi Sam template, in your persona’s voice, with one link and one sign-off.
- Build the form: one open text box asking for the good and the bad, a permission checkbox, a first-name field. Nothing else.
- Add “or just hit reply” to the email and confirm a real person can read what comes back to that address.
- Schedule it as Day 7 of the Sequence and write the Day 11 results email before the Day 7 one goes out, so the follow-up cannot get skipped.
- Start a file called quotes.txt with three columns: the quote, the first name, the date they gave permission. Every Proof email you write from here comes out of that file.

## **PART IV: THE 3 PERSUASIVE P'S**

# Anatomy of a Sales Email

At 19 I sold washers and dryers at Sears, and I was the leading sales person of extended warranties in the country.

I want to be clear about how little I knew. I could not have told you the drum capacity of a single machine on that floor. I did not know what the motor was rated for. When a customer asked me a real engineering question about the transmission I would flip the unit around and read the sticker on the back out loud like I was translating it.

What I could do was ask a guy why he was standing in the appliance department on a Saturday. Nobody wakes up wanting a washer. They wake up because the old one is leaking onto the basement floor, or because a repair guy quoted them more to fix the old one than the old one is worth, or because the kid plays travel soccer now and there are three loads a day of grass-stained everything. That is what they came in with. The washer is what they leave with. Those are different things, and the spec sheet only covers one of them.

**Bottom line:** Every sales email that I have ever written contains what I have come to refer to as the three P's: Pain, Potential and Proof. This is the anatomy of good sales copy. Name the problem in their words, show them what life looks like on the other side of it, then hand them somebody real who already crossed over. In that order, spread over days, one P per email.

## The receipts

From my smaller niche newsletter I generated over \$765,000 from less than 14,000 people. I have placed in the top five in every sales contest and even won a couple of them (along with a new BMW X5).

Do the division once, because it is the only number in this book I want you to memorize. \$765,000 divided by fewer than 14,000 subscribers is about **\$55 a subscriber**. Not per sale, not per campaign. Per human being who typed an address into a form and hit submit, measured over the life of that list.

That number is the yardstick. It tells you what a name on your list is worth, which tells you what you can afford to pay for the next one, which is the whole argument for spending real money on bait. Chapter 21, Reading the Numbers, does nothing but work with that figure and its cousins. Write yours on a sticky note. If you do not have one yet, you will after your first sequence runs.

I have always been a student of marketing, dating back to when I had my first marketing class at 12 years old. At 19 I sold washers and dryers at Sears. Between the crayon-level version at 12 and the commission version at 19 I learned the same thing twice: the story sells and the spec sheet does not. Everything in the next three chapters is that lesson in email form.

## Persuasion versus manipulation

Remember, do not mix up persuasion with fraud or manipulation.

Persuasion is a delicate art that helps people make a buying decision. You are helping tell a story about why a person would buy a product or service. You are helping them envision themselves buying the product or service and what it is going to do for them. The extended warranty on a washing machine is a real product. It really pays for the repair. The guy standing there with a repair quote in his pocket bigger than the machine is worth is the exact person it was built for. All I did was connect two things that were already true and already in the room.

Manipulation is what happens when one of those things is not true. You invent the testimonial. You invent the deadline. You describe a result the product cannot produce. You sell the warranty to the guy who is buying the floor model on clearance and walking it out on a dolly himself.

In Chapter 2, The Fast Company Story, I said I know how to make people do what I want them to do, and that line makes some people uncomfortable. Here is the boundary I hold it to. **The test is whether the buyer would thank you 30 days later.** If a real person, having spent real money, opens the box and finds what you said would be in it, you persuaded. If they open the box and feel stupid, you did the other thing, and you did it to an email list you now have to send to again next week.

That is not a morality lecture, it is arithmetic. A list is an asset you own for years. Burning one subscriber to close one sale is the worst trade in this book.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** Did you know that 8 people made the crock-pot until one person told the right story of what the crock-pot can do for you? Did you know that I launched a company in 2007 called AuctionAds, which had a dozen competitors already entrenched in the field? However, I was able to take the site to millions in revenue within 4 months and sell it! (It went to MediaWhiz for \$17M, and I promise you our code was not twelve times better than theirs.) How many people buy iPods because Apple makes the buyer believe that their product is the top of the line when there are devices that will do the exact same thing for 1/10th the price!?!? Everybody! Three versions of one point. The pot did not change. The ad network did not change. The chip in the music player did not change. The story around it changed, and the money followed the story.

## The three P's

The 3 P's work like this. Make them feel pain ("what you're missing"), show them the potential ("what if it could do X"), and give them the proof ("look at John who achieved X, in only X amount of days").

**Pain** is the email where you sell nothing at all. Somebody came looking for what you have because something in their life is not working, and the first job is to say that thing out loud, in their words, from your own experience rather than from a statistic. The washer on the basement floor. The profile picture that turned out to be from nine years and forty pounds ago. You are not manufacturing a wound here, you are naming one they arrived with, which is why this email is the easiest of the three to write and the one most people skip. Chapter 11 takes it apart line by line.

**Potential** is the email where hope shows up. The pain email left them staring at the floor, so this one asks what life looks like if the problem is simply solved: what if you could tell a fake profile from a real one before you spend a Thursday night on it. Not features, results. You are describing the far side of the problem in enough detail that they can see themselves standing there. Chapter 12.

**Proof** is the email where somebody who is not you does the talking. A real subscriber, in their own words, saying the thing worked. It is so powerful that you do not even need to make a sales pitch in it, and in the run I show you, I don't. This is what the Day 7 poll in Chapter 9, Engagement, exists to produce. Chapter 13.

When crafting your copy, try to follow this communication pattern every chance you get. Not only in the Sequence. In your landing page, in your checkout page, in the thing you say to a guy standing in the appliance department on a Saturday.

## Why the order matters

Run them backwards and watch what happens.

Lead with Proof and you have a stranger telling a stranger about a problem the reader has not admitted to yet. Jenny busted three guys off my guide is a fantastic line to somebody who spent last month getting stood up, and a completely meaningless line to somebody who has not agreed that online dating is a minefield.  
**Proof only proves something once a problem is on the table.**

Lead with Potential and you get the tone every piece of AI-written email in 2026 has: cheerful, capable, weightless, describing a wonderful outcome to a person who never said they wanted it. What if you could double your revenue. What if your skin cleared up. There is no tension in it because nothing was ever at stake, and a reader feels that in about a second and a half on a phone screen.

Pain first is what earns the next two. It is the only one of the three that costs you something to write, because it requires you to have been the person with the problem, which is also why a real human persona still beats generated copy. A model can produce a paragraph about frustration. It cannot produce the Saturday you spent on hold with a warranty company.

The volume curve runs subtle to dramatic, and we come back to it in Chapter 13. Pain is quiet. Potential is warm. Proof is loud and crowded, thousands of emails this morning, look at what everyone is doing. Then, and only then, the Gift days in Chapter 19 ask for money.

## Where people blow it

The most common failure is cramming all three P's into one email. You end up with a message that opens sad, turns hopeful, quotes a customer and asks for a sale, all above the fold, and it reads exactly like what it is. Each P gets its own send, with a day or two of silence around it, because the silence is what makes the next one land. Automation does this for you now. Set the delays once and every subscriber who opts in on a Tuesday at 2am walks the same three steps in the same order.

The second failure is selling in the Pain email. One link, one button, one “and that’s why I built my course” and the whole thing flips from a friend talking to a pitch wearing a friend costume. Say nothing. Sign it. Send it.

The third failure is faking the Proof. Whatever you do, do not make it up. It wrecks the asset you spent three months building, and Chapter 9 covers the rest of why. Run the poll from Chapter 9, ask for permission to quote by first name, and use what real people actually send you. Their sentences will be clumsier than anything you would have written, and they will convert better for exactly that reason.

The fourth one is quieter. People write the three P's about the product instead of about the reader. Pain becomes "most software in this category is bloated". Potential becomes "our platform is fast and easy to use". Proof becomes a logo wall. Nobody in that email is a person. Go back and rewrite every sentence so the subject is the reader or you, never the product.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Write the Proof email first, even though it sends last. It takes about four minutes and it tells you immediately whether you have real quotes or whether you have been planning to invent some. If the page is blank, stop writing sales copy and go run the Day 7 poll. You cannot bluff your way through the third email, so find out on Monday instead of on day eleven.

The next three chapters take one P each, and all three use the same worked example: a dating persona named Sarah, writing to a subscriber named Jim, three emails, one run. Read them together and you will see the whole machine move. The three emails are the shape, not three fixed calendar slots; Chapter 18 shows where the same three moves sit inside the twenty days.

## Do this Monday

- Write one sentence of Pain about your product, using something that actually happened to you. If you cannot, go read the last 50 complaints in your niche's forum or subreddit and steal their exact words.
- Write one sentence of Potential that describes a result, not a feature. The hot date, not the fast car.
- Open your inbox or your support tickets and find one real customer sentence you could quote in a Proof email. Email that person and ask permission to use their first name.
- Divide your total revenue from your list by the number of people on it. That is your dollars per subscriber. Write it down.
- Take the last promotional email you sent and label each paragraph P, O, R or nothing. Count the paragraphs that got nothing.

# Pain

In 2013 we gave away a guide in the dating vertical called “How To Spot a Fake Online Dating Profile.” Nobody ever typed their email address into that form because they wanted a PDF.

They typed it in because a profile picture had lied to them and they had already sat across a table from the proof. The guide was the bait. The drive home was the reason.

Every list you will ever build is made of people in that car. The first real email you send them either shows you have been in the car too, or it shows you were selling a PDF.

**Bottom line:** The first sales email in the run is the one where you sell nothing. You name the problem out loud, in your persona’s own words, from your persona’s own experience, and then you stop. Pain written from what happened to you buys you the right to sell later. Pain written from statistics reads like a brochure, and people have been throwing brochures away since before email existed.

## They came to you

Every address on your list raised its hand first. There is a reason people are looking for the product you are selling. They have a problem or desire, and **they came to you looking for the solution**. It’s not like you were banging down their door soliciting them.

That is a much bigger advantage than most people use. A cold call has to invent a problem before it can sell anything, which is why the guy calling your cell at 6:40 on a Tuesday opens with a question about your water heater. You skip all of that. Somebody typed their address into a form to get a free Mr. Goodcents sandwich, and told you what they wanted in the same motion (Chapter 3, The Bait).

Although your product or service may meet the customer’s need, you need to build a relationship and relate to them on their level before you can start selling. You do that by clearly and openly talking about the problem, and more importantly, your own specific experiences with the same problem.

What almost everybody does instead is answer the raised hand with a product page. The address goes in the platform, and Email One is a header image, a paragraph about the company’s commitment to quality, and a 15% off code. That person just told you something hurts, and you handed them a coupon and a logo.

## The email

Here is the pain email. It goes to Jim, who downloaded the dating guide four days ago. Read it as Jim.

One piece of housekeeping first, because you are going to catch this yourself in about nine seconds. The email is signed Sarah, and Chapter 5 hands Sarah “White Lightning” James to the white teeth niche and gives dating to Anna “The Dating Guru” Starr. That is my mess, not yours. I wrote this sample in the 2013 white paper, then printed the six-persona table a few pages later and never held one up against the other. I am leaving the email exactly as it was written instead of quietly swapping the signature, because the sloppy version is the real one, and none of what it does depends on what she is called.

*One question I get a lot is why did I start this free online dating tip website? The answer is pretty easy but, kind of a bummer. Long story short is that I wanted to help people like you who are going through exactly what I went through 8 years ago.*

*I can't tell you how many times I met people that looked nothing like their profile picture.*

*I can't tell you how many times I met people that were really married and lied.*

*I can't tell you how many times I met people that stood me up!*

*I really love to help people and I feel like this is my calling in life. I look forward to working with you Jim and helping you find the happiness that I have (without all the suffering).*

*Talk soon, Sarah*

That is the whole email. **Nothing in it is for sale.** No price, no product name, no “click here”, no special offer, no deadline. The only thing in the message carrying a link is the furniture in the template itself, which still has a Buy Now button on it because every email does (Chapter 20). The body asks for nothing.

Eight sentences. Read it out loud and it takes about thirty seconds, which is roughly what you get on a phone screen before a thumb moves.

## Taking it apart

**One question I get a lot is why did I start this free online dating tip website.** Jim never asked that question. Sarah answers it anyway, which makes the whole email feel overheard instead of aimed at him. It also smuggles in the origin story without the persona ever having to say “let me tell you about myself,” and it does it in the first line, before anyone has decided to keep reading.

**The answer is pretty easy but, kind of a bummer.** That is a warning label. It sets the emotional register of the next four lines and it gives Jim a reason to stay for them. A sentence that promises a bummer is a sentence people finish.

**8 years ago.** Distance. Sarah is not in the hole, she climbed out of it eight years back, which is what makes her a mentor instead of a person venting at strangers. A persona still drowning in the problem cannot sell the solution to it. That is the reluctant hero from Chapter 8 doing its job in four words.

**The three parallel lines.** Three real pains, each one a thing that physically happened, each one written to the same beat: “I can’t tell you how many times I met people that.” The repetition is the point. One complaint is a person having a bad week. Three identical openings stacked on top of each other reads as a pattern, and a pattern is what Jim has been living.

They are also bold, on their own lines, double spaced. That is the skimmer trick from Chapter 14 in action. A big chunk of your list reads nothing but the bold, and if Jim reads nothing but the bold in this email he still gets fake pictures, married liars, and no-shows, which is the entire message.

**I look forward to working with you Jim.** One first name, used once, late, in a sentence that is about him rather than about her. First names at the top of an email are wallpaper now because every platform on earth merges them into the greeting. Dropping it in the middle of the last paragraph reads like a person typing.

**Helping you find the happiness that I have (without all the suffering).** That parenthetical is the entire offer, and no product is named in it. “Without all the suffering” tells Jim what he is buying (the shortcut past the eight years) without asking him to buy anything today.

**Talk soon, Sarah.** A human being signs it. Not “The Team”, not “Customer Happiness”, not the company name. Chapter 5 made that decision already; this is where it pays.

## What kills a pain email

Statistics. The instant you write “41% of online daters report encountering misleading profiles,” Jim is reading a report, and nobody has ever been moved by a report. **Statistics are not pain.** Statistics are what you reach for when you have not actually lived the thing and you are hoping a number will cover for it.

Selling inside it. Any price, any discount, any “limited time” turns the confession into a pitch, and the reader re-reads the three pain lines as sales copy, because that is what they now are. The pain email earns its place by asking for zero.

Borrowed pain with no owner. If your persona genuinely has not lived the problem, do not fake the memory. Attribute it: “A guy emailed me last month and said he had paid the minimum on a card for eleven months and watched the balance go up.” That is somebody’s real experience, honestly labeled, and it beats a made-up autobiography that a customer can catch you in.

Seven pains instead of three. I have watched people write a pain email with a nine-item list because they did not want to leave anything out. A nine-item list is a survey. Pick the three that made people in your niche say something out loud in a parking lot.

Vagueness. “Dating can be tough out there” is not pain, it is a greeting card. “They looked nothing like their profile picture” is pain, because it puts a specific face across a specific table. Same rule in every niche: the sentence has to be something that happened, not a category the thing belongs to.

## Finding the pain

Every pain part should follow this basic template. Basically start with, “One question I always get is why did I start this free online resource?” Then continue on and answer the question with the most common pain points.

If you don’t know what these are right away for your niche, **just do a little research and see what people are bitching about**. Not a survey you designed, not a persona document from an agency. Actual complaints, in the actual words people used when they were annoyed.

Watch what happens when I rebuild the thing for a different niche. I am writing the next three lines in front of you as an exercise, in the voice of the debt persona from Chapter 5, Robert “The Debt Bandit” Hawkins. Nobody emailed me these. There is no real Robert, there never was, and I am making the lines up on the page so you can see the shape they have to hold. Same opener, same three beats:

*One question I get a lot is why did I start this free debt reduction site? The answer is easy and kind of a bummer. I wanted to help people like you who are going through exactly what I went through.*

*I can't tell you how many times I paid the minimum for a year and watched the balance go up anyway.*

*I can't tell you how many times a collector called me at work and said my name in front of everybody.*

*I can't tell you how many times I moved a balance to a new card and felt like I had fixed something.*

Nothing in those three lines came out of a spreadsheet, and nothing in them came out of a study either. They are specific enough that somebody who has lived it feels caught, and somebody who has not lived it has no idea they are reading a template. That is all a demonstration is allowed to prove. If you are actually running the debt niche, your three lines come out of your own pain.txt file in the words of people who called your support number, and they will beat the three I just invented, because mine are a drawing of the thing and yours are the thing.

Write twenty candidate lines before you pick three. The three that survive are almost never the three you would have guessed on the whiteboard.

## **Where the bitching lives**

Back in 2013 this research meant forums and the phone. The places changed; the job did not.

One-star and two-star reviews of your competitor's product, or of the free option people try first. Skip the five-star reviews, they teach you nothing. The three-star reviews are the gold-mine, because they start with what the person wanted and then tell you exactly where it let them down, in sentences you can almost paste straight into the email.

Long threads on Reddit and whatever forum your niche actually lives on. People will write four paragraphs about their problem for free, at midnight, with more detail than any survey you could pay for.

Your own support inbox, your chat transcripts, and your refund reasons. That last one hurts to read and it is the most honest document your company owns.

The Day 7 poll from Chapter 9. The half of that survey where you ask for something they did not like is pain research in your subscribers' own words, volunteered, with permission to quote it back.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** Watch the first fifteen seconds of any infomercial ever made. Black and white footage, somebody fighting with a jar lid, spilling a bucket, dropping a folded map in the wind. No product, no price, no host. They spend money on film crews to show you the problem before they will let you see the thing they are selling. That is the pain email with a camera.

Keep all of it in one plain text file, in the customer's words, not yours. Mine says the price, the wait, the fake picture. It never says "friction in the onboarding experience."

Then write the email, and know what you have just done to Jim. He is crushed and his dreams are shattered, which is exactly where the pain email is supposed to leave him, and exactly why you never send it by itself. Chapter 12, Potential, is the email that shows up next with the hope in it.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Always speak from your own experience. It is so much more powerful to share experiences than to talk about a theory. Consumers can relate to your experience a lot better than a list of statistics.

## Do this Monday

- Open a file called pain.txt and paste in twenty real complaints from one-star reviews, forum threads, and your own support inbox, copied word for word.
- Group them until three survive, then rewrite those three in parallel, each starting "I can't tell you how many times."
- Write your opener: "One question I get a lot is why did I start this free \_\_\_\_." Fill in the blank with your bait from Chapter 3.
- Delete every price, link, product name and discount code from the draft. If the email still works, it is a pain email. If it collapses, you wrote an ad.
- Bold only the three pain lines, double space between them, and read the bold by itself to make sure it still tells the story.
- Send the draft to one person who actually has the problem and ask which of the three lines made them wince. Cut the one that did not.

# Potential

The second email in the Sarah run opens with an apology. “I am sorry if I bummed you out with that last email.” That is the first line, ahead of any offer, any bullet, any link.

I wrote that line into the 2013 PAR Program dating template, and it never got cut, whatever the niche. Most copywriters who see this sequence want to cut the apology and lead with the good news, because an apology looks like a few wasted words at the top of a sales email.

Leave it. That sentence is doing more work than the bullets under it.

**Bottom line:** Potential is the shortest of the 3 Persuasive P’s and the easiest one to ruin. Its only job is to take the person you just made miserable in the pain email and show them the misery has a fix, without naming the fix, without pricing it, and without asking for anything. You say sorry, you give one hopeful line for each pain you inflicted, you promise something is coming, and you sign off. If the reader finishes your potential email knowing what you sell, you wrote the wrong email.

## Say sorry first

With the pain approach, you basically just pissed in this person’s Cheerios. They are crushed and their dreams are shattered! You just told a guy who has been on dating sites for two years that the fake pictures and the married liars and the no-shows are not bad luck, they are the normal condition of the thing he has been pouring his Friday nights into.

Now, it is time to let them know that there is hope; there is Potential. This is where your persona comes in!

**The apology is the handshake.** It does three things that a subject line full of good news cannot do. It proves a human being wrote the previous email and remembers writing it, because nobody apologizes for a broadcast. It puts the persona on the reader’s side of the table instead of across from it. And it tells the reader their reaction was correct, that the last email was in fact a bummer, which means the persona is not going to lie to them about the easy stuff either.

Sarah is not apologizing for being wrong. She is apologizing for the feeling. That distinction is the entire move. “Sorry if I bummed you out” keeps every word of the pain email true and still gets her back in the room.

## The email itself

Here is the whole thing, exactly as it went out in the dating sequence.

*I am sorry if I bummed you out with that last email. Let me ask you this, how awesome would it be if there was a service out there that solved all the major problems with dating?*

- *How to spot a fake profile from a real one.*
- *An absolute foolproof way to spot if someone is lying about being married.*
- *How to tell if a person is a flake.*

*Well that would be pretty sweet and I got to tell you since I discovered those items it has really been a game changer for me.*

*And me being your girl, I am going to light you up with some knowledge.*

*Talk soon, Sarah*

That is 113 words including the sign-off. It is the shortest of the three sales emails and it is the one I get the most grief about, because it does not sell anything, it does not link anywhere, and it ends right when it gets interesting.

Look at what is missing. There is no product name. There is no price. There is no “click here”. There is no guide, no download, no dashboard, no membership. There is no sentence anywhere in it that tells Jim what Sarah is going to do or when she is going to do it. The email raises a question and then walks out of the room.

**The question is the whole email.** “How awesome would it be if there was a service out there that solved all the major problems with dating?” Jim answers that in his own head, in his own words, with his own last two years of wasted Friday nights loaded into the answer. Anything Sarah writes instead is worse than what Jim comes up with on his own, because she does not know his Fridays and he does.

## One pain, one potential

Count the bullets in the pain email, then write exactly that many bullets in the potential email, in the same order. That is the rule and it is mechanical.

Chapter 11 gave Jim three pains: people who looked nothing like their profile picture, people who were really married and lied, people who stood him up. The potential email gives him fake profile, lying about being married, flake. One to one, same order, no extras. Jim does not consciously notice the pairing. He does not have to. He reads the second bullet and something in the back of his head goes, that is the thing that happened to me in March, and Sarah just said it out loud twice in four days.

Extra bullets break it. If Sarah had added “how to write a profile that gets replies” she would have introduced a problem Jim never raised, and the list stops being about him. Missing bullets break it too. Name a pain in email one and leave it hanging in email two and you have told the reader that the worst of the three is the one you cannot fix.

Run it in another niche and the shape holds. Imagine the debt version, sent by the persona I built for that list, Robert “The Debt Bandit” Hawkins. His pain email names a minimum payment that barely moves the balance, collection calls that land during dinner, and an interest rate the reader got talked into on the phone without reading anything. The potential email then reads: what if you knew which balance to kill first. What if that rate could be cut in one phone call. What if the calls stopped and it was completely legal. Same items, same order, no answers.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Do not write the potential email from scratch. Open the pain email, copy it into a new draft, and rewrite each pain line as a “what if” line. Same count, same order, same nouns. The parallel language is what makes the reader feel understood, and you get it for free when you work off the previous email instead of a blank page.

## Stop at what if

The sale is not in this email and you have to be disciplined about that. The pull to close here is enormous, because the reader has never been warmer than they are at this exact moment and every instinct you have says put the button in front of them right now.

This is the email where they are the hungriest and the least ready. They know they have a problem (you told them Tuesday). They now know the problem is solvable (you just told them). What they do not have yet is one single reason to believe that you specifically are the one who can solve it. Ask for money before you have given them that and you are a stranger with a claim, which is what the rest of their inbox already is.

Four things kill a potential email, and I have done all four. Naming the product turns “how awesome would it be” into a brochure. Pricing anything turns the reader into a shopper who now wants to compare you to something. Explaining how the trick works answers the question and there is nothing left to open tomorrow. Stacking bullet number four through nine turns a personal list into a feature grid.

Chapter 20 says every email you send should carry a Buy Now button, and I still mean it. On this one the button sits in the template and the copy never points at it. The person who is already sold can click it. Everyone else gets a 113-word email that asks them a question and does not chase them.

**Neither the pain email nor this one asks for anything**, and this one does not even hint that there is something to ask for. Not a poll, not a survey, not a reply request, not a link. Two emails in a row that want nothing from the reader is precisely why the third one gets opened.

## The open loop

“And me being your girl, I am going to light you up with some knowledge.”

That sentence is a promise with no delivery date and no delivery method, and it is the most valuable line in the email. It tells Jim that something is coming, that it is coming from Sarah personally, and that it is coming soon. It does not tell him what it is. He now has a thing on his mental calendar and no way to satisfy it except to open the next thing that shows up from that sender name.

Two details in it are worth copying. “Me being your girl” is the persona claiming a relationship out loud, which she has earned by spending an entire email on his problems and none on her product. “Light you up with some knowledge” is a phrase nobody writes in a marketing meeting. It is sloppy, it is regional, it sounds like a person typed it on a phone. Everything else in the inbox that day was written by a committee.

**Close the loop in the next email, not this one.** A loop you open on Tuesday and close on Thursday is a promise kept. A loop you open and never close is a sender the reader stops opening, and I have burned lists doing exactly that.

## Where AI drafts fall apart

Ask any of the current writing tools for the second email in a three-email sequence and you will get something that is clean, grammatical, on brand, and useless, because it will answer its own question in the same message.

It cannot stand the tension. Give it the three pains and it will hand you back three bullets that immediately explain how to spot a fake profile, and then a paragraph that names the guide, and then a link, and then a line about how there is no obligation. It resolves everything it raises, inside 400 words, because it is optimizing for a complete and helpful message. A complete message is the opposite of what this email is.

The apology comes out wrong too. What you get is “we apologize for any inconvenience” or “I hope that message did not come across as too negative”, which is a company clearing its throat. Sarah wrote “I am sorry if I bummed you out with that last email.” Read those out loud one after the other and you can hear which one came from a person who remembers sending the last one.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** A movie trailer is two minutes long, shows you the explosion, shows you the face, and does not tell you whether anybody lives. Nobody walks out of the theater angry that the trailer withheld the ending. That is the potential email. If the trailer showed the last scene you would have no reason to buy a ticket, and you would also think slightly less of the movie.

Use the tools for the boring parts if you want. Have one clean up your spelling, sort your pain research, or write you forty subject-line options for the same email. Do not let one write the email that has to end on a cliff, because it will build you a staircase down the other side every time.

Two days from now Jim gets the third email and he is salivating. He believes there is a fix and he has no evidence that Sarah is the one holding it. That evidence is a person with a name and a number, and it is Chapter 13.

## Do this Monday

- Open your pain email, copy it into a new draft, and rewrite every pain line as a “what if” line in the same order.
- Delete the product name, the price, the link and the word “guide” from that draft, then read what is left.
- Put an apology in the first sentence that covers the feeling and takes back none of the facts.
- Write one closing promise with no date and no method attached to it, in the persona’s own sloppy words.
- Cut the draft until it is under 150 words, then schedule it 48 hours behind the pain email.

- Put the thing you promised on your calendar for two days after that, so the loop actually closes.

# Proof

The third email in the Sarah run opened with an apology for being late, and Sarah was not late. Nobody was waiting on her. There was no backlog, no inbox on fire, no thousands of people hammering a send button at six in the morning. The email went out on the schedule we built weeks before a subscriber named Jim ever typed his address into a form.

Here is the first line, exactly as it went out in 2013: “Wow... sorry for making you wait! I woke up this morning only to get FLOODED with thousands of emails from people wanting my tips RIGHT NOW!”

Count what that one sentence does. It says you are at the front of a line you did not know you were standing in. It says the line is long. It says the reason you waited is that everybody else wants the same thing, and it says all of it while appearing to apologize to you personally. Urgency and crowd, in twenty-six words, before the reader has scrolled.

**Bottom line:** the proof email hands the subscriber one real person who already got the result, with a name on it and a number in it, and then it asks for homework instead of money. It is the loudest email of the 3 Persuasive P’s and the only one that does not need a pitch, because somebody else already made the pitch for you.

## Where the last email left them

The potential email in Chapter 12 ended on an open loop and no answer. That is deliberate, and it sets up the state the proof email arrives into. In the original I wrote it like this: “after that last email people are going to be salivating. There is hope! They have been failing all this time, and it all makes sense now!”

Somebody in that state does not need more argument. They need one reason to stop being suspicious. **Proof does not argue, it shows a person who already got the thing**, and the reader does the rest of the work themselves.

The original says how to do it in one sentence, and thirteen years later I have not found a better one: “In the proof email you must demonstrate that there are a LOT of people interested, so posting feedback from someone who has used your guide is a very powerful method to provide social proof to your subscriber. It is so powerful that you do not even need to make a sales pitch.”

Read that last clause twice, because it is the part everybody skips. The proof email has no offer in it. No price, no button, no “click here to buy.” The pitch comes later, on Day 14, when the Gift days start. What this email buys is belief, and belief is cheaper to buy when you are not also asking for a credit card in the same breath.

## The email

Here it is whole, the way it went out, with the sign-off.

*Jim,*

*Wow... sorry for making you wait! I woke up this morning only to get FLOODED with thousands of emails from people wanting my tips RIGHT NOW!*

*Jenny said, “Sarah, you out did yourself this time. I just totally busted out 3 guys, two for being married and one for not using their real picture. So simple, yet so effective. This is the real deal, Sarah. People are going to love this guide!”*

*That’s awesome! Make sure you send me your stories about busting people from my Online Dating Tips Guide!*

*So, I am really excited to finish this up for you, Jim. Like I said before please go right now and make the following profiles. Don’t worry about filling out too much we will go over that step-by-step tomorrow. It’s vital that you are ready to go.*

*Again here are the ones I want you to have accounts on:*

- *eHarmony*
- *Zoosk*
- *match*

*Talk Soon, Sarah*

## Taking it apart

The apology is a crowd. “Sorry for making you wait” only makes sense if there is a line, so the line gets asserted without ever being claimed as a fact about the business. Nobody said “we have 40,000 subscribers.” Sarah said she got flooded, which is a thing a person says about their own morning.

The quote is one person with a name. Not “our users,” not “the community,” not “feedback has been overwhelming.” Jenny. One woman, in quotation marks, talking to Sarah by name.

**The quote carries a number and the number is weird.** Three guys, two for being married, one for a fake picture. Three is not a round number. Nobody making up a testimonial writes three, and nobody making one up bothers to break three into two and one. That arithmetic is the single most convincing thing in the entire email, and it costs nothing except asking the real person a follow-up question.

The quote also does the product review for you. “So simple, yet so effective” is a claim about ease of use. “This is the real deal” handles the suspicion. “People are going to love this guide” says other people, again, without Sarah saying it about herself. Sarah never once says her guide is good in this email. She does not have to.

Then the recruiting line: “Make sure you send me your stories about busting people from my Online Dating Tips Guide!” That sentence is the proof machine feeding itself. Every subscriber who reads it is being asked to become next month’s Jenny, which is where the next quote comes from, which is what Chapter 9 was for.

And the close is homework, not a sale. Go make accounts. Do not fill them out yet, we will do that tomorrow together, just be ready. The subscriber ends this email having done something rather than having been sold something.

## **Proof is a person**

Write that on something. **A percentage is a claim and a person is evidence**, and your subscriber has been lied to by percentages since they were old enough to watch television.

“Ninety-four percent of users report better results in thirty days” is a sentence I just made up, which is exactly the problem with it. It has no author. Nobody said it. You cannot picture the person, you cannot check it, and every competitor in your category has a sentence shaped exactly like it in their footer. It reads like it came out of a compliance department, because that is where sentences like that go to be approved.

“I just totally busted out 3 guys, two for being married and one for not using their real picture” has a person behind it, a specific afternoon behind it, and a number that is too odd to have been invented. It is worse writing and better proof.

The test is whether the quote could have been written by the company. If it could, throw it out. Real people say things like “so simple, yet so effective” and they use the word totally and they misuse punctuation and they name the weird specific thing that mattered to them, which is almost never the feature you built the landing page around.

Now do it in a niche that is not dating. Take Robert “The Debt Bandit” Hawkins, the debt-reduction persona from Chapter 5. The garbage version of his proof email says his subscribers reduce their balances faster. The working version says: “Robert, I called the card company like you said and asked for the hardship program by name. They knocked my rate from 24 down to 9 and I did not even have to be nice about it.” Same email, same slot in the run, and the second one has a phone call in it.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** When you collect feedback with the Day 7 poll from Chapter 9, add one question: “What specifically happened?” Not “how was it,” not a star rating. A star rating gives you a number you cannot print in an email. “What specifically happened” gives you three guys, two for being married. That single extra field is the difference between a folder of praise you cannot use and a folder of proof you can.

## Jenny has to be real

Jenny is not real. Sarah is not real either. Both are examples I wrote in 2013 to show the shape of an email, and I am telling you that in the same chapter where I am telling you to go get quotes, because the shape is the lesson and the quote is not.

In an actual campaign, the words inside those quotation marks come from an actual customer who actually sent them to you. The original said it in capital letters and I am not going to soften it here: do not make it up. It has to come from real people.

Two reasons, and the smaller one is the legal one. The United States now has rules with civil penalties attached to fake reviews and made-up testimonials, which was not the case in 2013 when I first wrote this, and Chapter 9 has the one paragraph I will say about that. File it away, because a fine is not why you should not do it.

The bigger reason is that fake quotes read fake. You will write “our product has truly transformed my business” because that is what your brain produces when it is impersonating a customer, and it will sit in the email like a mannequin. Then a real subscriber will reply with one line about a hardship program and a rate going from 24 to 9, and you will realize you could not have written it, and that is the exact quality you were trying to fake.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** Two restaurants next door to each other, same street, same menu prices. One has eleven people standing outside on the sidewalk and one has empty tables you can see through the window. You will wait forty minutes for the first one. You have no information about either kitchen. The line is the entire argument, which is why “I woke up FLOODED” is doing more work in Sarah’s email than any adjective she could have put in front of the word guide.

## The homework carries the links

The bottom of the proof email is a list of accounts to go make: eHarmony, Zoosk, match. In 2013 those were affiliate links, and that is where the money in this particular sequence lived. I will say plainly that affiliate marketing is not my world anymore, but the mechanic is worth understanding no matter what you sell.

**The proof email is the easiest email in the whole run to get compliance out of**, because you just showed the reader somebody who did the thing and got a result. Ask for an action here and you get it. Ask on Day 2 and you do not.

So put the action you actually need in this email. If you sell software, this is where they create the free account. If you are a dentist, this is where they pick a time on the calendar. If you sell a physical product, this is where they check whether their existing thing is the old model. The action has to be free, it has to take under five minutes, and it has to be a real step toward the purchase you will ask for on Day 14.

Notice the tension Sarah keeps while she does it: “Don’t worry about filling out too much we will go over that step-by-step tomorrow.” She is handing out a task and booking the next email in the same sentence. The reader now has a reason to open tomorrow that exists inside their own half-finished profile.

## Subtle to dramatic

Here is how I closed this section in the original, and I am keeping it:

*BOOM! Do you now see how effective this little trick is? And the best part is that it works for just about ANYTHING.*

*The approach is simple. Go from subtle to dramatic. It has ALWAYS worked for me.*

The volume curve is the part people miss when they steal the three P’s. **Pain quietly, potential warmly, proof loudly.** The pain email in Chapter 11 has no exclamation points in it, because a person describing being stood up does not shout. The potential email opens with an apology and three what-ifs. Then the proof email arrives in all caps, FLOODED, RIGHT NOW, BOOM.

Run those three at the same volume and the Sequence dies. All quiet and the reader never feels anything worth acting on. All loud and you are a carnival barker from the first email, and the pain email, which is supposed to sound like a friend admitting something, sounds like a pitch. The escalation is what makes the third email land, and the third email is the one that has to land.

Here is the whole run on one page.

| Email     | Job                                                                         | Ask                              |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Pain      | Name the problem out loud, from the persona’s own experience                | Nothing                          |
| Potential | Say there is hope and show it in bullets that match the pains one for one   | Nothing, but leave the loop open |
| Proof     | Show one named person who already got the result, and the crowd behind them | Do the free homework today       |

Three emails, one ask, and the ask is not money. The money comes on Day 14, and by then the reader has read your persona admit something, imagine something, and then be right.

You now have the architecture of the sales email. What you do not have yet is the writing itself: how long a paragraph runs, where the bold goes, what happens in the first two lines that show in a phone preview, and why most marketing email loses the reader before the first bullet. That is Part V.

## Do this Monday

- Open the last testimonial you collected and look for a number in it. If there is not one, email that customer back with one question: what specifically happened?
- Delete every percentage from your current proof copy and replace it with one named person, first name and last initial, with their permission.
- Write your version of the crowd line. Not a subscriber count, a human sentence about your morning: what got flooded, what you are behind on, who is waiting.
- Pick the free action that goes at the bottom of your proof email, the one that takes under five minutes and moves the reader one real step toward the purchase.
- Read your three emails out loud back to back and listen to the volume. If the first one shouts, rewrite it quieter until the third one is the only one shouting.

# **PART V: COPYWRITING 101**

# Keep the Focus

Turn on a television tonight and count the cuts. Any channel. A cooking show, a football game, a car commercial, the ten o'clock news. Put the second hand of a clock where you can see it and count how long they hold one camera angle before they move to another one.

Now open the last marketing email your company sent and count the cuts in that.

Most of the ones that land in my inbox have exactly one. There is a logo at the top, and then there are four hundred words of gray paragraph, and then there is an unsubscribe link. One angle, held for two minutes. If a network did that during a car chase, the ratings guy would be in somebody's office by Tuesday.

**Bottom line:** This copywriting guide, much like the 3 P's, is a system I use for every email that I send out. It's the method to my madness. It's my little glowing thing in my chest that Iron Man has that gives him all his power... or something. There are five rules in it: mix it up, bold it for the skimmers, keep it short, double space it, and tell people exactly what to do. Every one of those rules exists because a screen trained your reader long before your email showed up.

## Mix it up

Television has totally warped our ability to focus. Next time you flip on the tube, watch how long they keep the same camera angle. It's usually 5-10 seconds. CRAZY, right? No wonder everyone has A.D.D. We have been conditioned to know that action is going to happen every 5 to 10 seconds and when it doesn't happen then we bolt, change the channel or in our case... delete the email.

So we do what television does. We need to use bullet points, use italic fonts, bold things, highlight phrases and most importantly, we need to do it often.

A cut in an email is anything that makes the eye move. A bold phrase. A bullet. A one-line paragraph sitting by itself with white space above and below it. A short line of dialogue. A link. A question mark. None of these are decoration. Each one is a reason for the eye to keep going instead of stopping.

**Cut something every two or three lines or they leave.** That is the whole rule. Open your draft, take a pencil, and mark every place the reader's eye gets a new thing to land on. If you find three marks in a 300-word email, you have a two-minute static shot and you are going to lose them somewhere around the middle of paragraph two.

This guide is basically a textbook example of how to do this.

I mean, you're still reading, right?

The thing that kills most business email is not bad writing. It is even writing. Every paragraph the same length, every sentence the same weight, every line landing with the same thud, page after page, like a man reading a phone book in a steady voice. It can be grammatically perfect and still get deleted at second three, because nothing in it ever changes.

## Bold for skimmers

Another huge and very powerful technique is to use bold text as a way to communicate to those people who only skim emails. The bold text will stand out to this type of person. And even though they did not read the entire email and **ONLY** read the bold text, they will still be able to understand the main points of the email. Wild, huh? It works... and it works really well.

Here is the part most people get backwards.  
**Write the bold first, then write the email around it.**

Sit down and write three to five short lines that carry the entire message. Not sentences, phrases. Five to nine words each. Those are your bold lines. Then write the email that connects them. When you are finished, read only the bold lines, out loud, top to bottom. If a stranger hearing just those lines could tell you what you want them to do, the email works for the skimmer. If they cannot, you bolded the wrong words and no amount of body copy is going to save it.

Sarah's pain email in Chapter 11 is the cleanest example in this book, and the trick is sitting right there in the middle of it:

*I can't tell you how many times I met people that looked nothing like their profile picture.*

*I can't tell you how many times I met people that were really married and lied.*

*I can't tell you how many times I met people that stood me up!*

Three lines, same opening seven words, three different knives. A skimmer reads those and gets the entire email without ever touching the paragraphs above or below them. That parallel structure does the job bold does, using repetition instead of weight, which is why it survives even when somebody reads the message in a plain-text client with no formatting at all.

The failures here are easy to spot once you look for them. Bolding a whole paragraph, which is the same as bolding nothing. Bolding the product name every time it appears, so the skim path reads “Acme Acme Acme Acme.” Bolding the parts you personally find interesting instead of the parts that carry the ask. And my favorite, bolding a sentence that contains no verb the reader can act on.

Look at how I put these methods into practice throughout this guide. I have been doing it for so long that it’s now just instinctive for me. And soon it will be for you, too.

## Short and sweet

I see long copy all the time and it makes me want to puke. It is one thing if it’s a landing page where you can do all kinds of graphics and whatnot. But in a text-based email, trust me, people will not read the entire thing. No one has the TIME! And the more you write, the more likely they are to tune out and feel like they are being sold to.

**Under 200 words, or you are writing for yourself.** That is the number I hold my own sends to, and it is not a stylistic preference, it is a delete-rate preference.

Go count the Sarah pain email. Opener, three parallel lines, a short close, a sign-off. It runs about 140 words including “Talk soon, Sarah,” and it does more work than any 800-word newsletter I have ever received. The Sarah potential email is shorter. The gift reminder in Chapter 19 is three lines.

Write it long if that is how your brain works, then cut it by 40 percent before you send it. Specifically:

- Delete every sentence whose only job is to explain the sentence before it.
- Delete every sentence that starts with “As you know” or “I wanted to reach out” or “I hope this finds you well.”
- Delete adjectives. If the noun is not doing the work, a word in front of it will not fix that.
- Delete the paragraph where you explain who you are. They already opted in. The persona in Chapter 5 is who you are.
- Delete the second ask. There is only ever one ask.

Length is also a tone problem, not only an attention problem. The longer an email runs, the more it feels like a pitch, because nobody writes eleven paragraphs to a friend about a coupon. Short reads as a person. Long reads as a department.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** Go watch any chase scene in *Bad Boys*, the 1995 movie I lifted Mike Lowery's name from (Chapter 7). Try to hold one camera angle in your head for ten full seconds. You cannot do it, and that movie came out before your subscriber's phone existed. Everything since then has been trained on top of that.

## Spacing

Double space between key points. Even if it's just a one-liner.

I am pretty sure that breaks some grammatical rules, but we are not trying to be *grammarsaurus rex* here. We are trying to get people to purchase and complete specific actions.

**White space is a cut you get for free.** It costs no words, it renders identically in every email client ever built, and it turns a wall into a set of steps.

Here is the mechanical version of the rule. One idea per paragraph. One to three sentences per paragraph. A blank line between every paragraph, including the one-line ones, and especially the one-line ones. No indents. Left aligned, always, because centered body text on a narrow screen turns into a ragged diamond and reads like a wedding invitation.

Then do the test that matters: send the draft to yourself and open it on your phone. Not on your 27-inch monitor where you wrote it. A paragraph that looks like four lines on a desktop is eleven lines on a phone, and eleven lines with no break in them read as homework. Most of your list is reading in a hallway, in a car line at a school, in the four minutes between meetings.

The grammar people are going to hate a couple of things in your email. Sentence fragments. Paragraphs of four words. A line that starts with "And." Let them. Nobody has ever forwarded an email to a friend because the clauses were balanced.

## Tell people what to do

Step by step, you have to tell people exactly what to do.

- Click on this link and do X
- Right now I want you to do X.

These people came to you for advice. You are their mentor and have been communicating with them since the beginning. They need you to metaphorically hold their hand and guide them through the entire process. Oftentimes walking people through it step by step, as you will see in the emails later in this book, drastically improves conversions.

**One instruction per email, stated as an order.** Not a suggestion, and not one option sitting next to two others. “Right now I want you to do X” is a complete and polite sentence, and it converts because there is nothing left to decide.

Sarah’s proof email in Chapter 13 is built on this. After the testimonial, she does not say “you may want to consider signing up somewhere.” She tells Jim to go make accounts, right now, names the sites in a list, tells him not to worry about filling out the profiles because they will do that together tomorrow, and tells him to be ready. Jim has no decision to make. Jim has a task, a list, and a reason to open tomorrow’s email.

Watch the ways this goes wrong, because I have written every one of them:

- “Let me know if you have any questions.” That is not an instruction, that is an exit.
- “Feel free to check it out whenever you get a chance.” Nobody ever got a chance.
- Two links to two different things, so the reader picks neither.
- A button that says “Learn More,” which asks somebody to volunteer for reading.
- Burying the ask in the last paragraph, under the part where you thanked them for their time.

If a step takes more than one action, number the steps. Four numbered steps beat one paragraph describing four steps, every single time, and it costs you nothing but a couple of line breaks.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Before you send anything, read only the bold lines and the links out loud to a person who does not work for you. Ask them what you want them to do. If they hesitate for even a second, do not touch the body copy. Fix the bold and fix the ask, then send it.

## What changed by 2026

The 5 to 10 seconds got shorter. Pull up a short-video feed and count the cuts yourself, the same way I told you to count them on television in 2013. Nothing a network ever put on the air moved that fast, and a phone full of it is the thing your subscriber was holding ninety seconds before your email arrived. My 2013 number was generous even then. My working rule of thumb now is that your email gets a couple of seconds, if that, to prove it is going somewhere.

The preview pane is now the doorway. On a phone, most mail apps show the sender, the subject, and roughly two lines of body text. Those two lines are read by more people than will ever open the email. Do not spend them on “Having trouble viewing this email? Click here.” Spend them on the first real sentence.

Images get blocked, dark mode inverts your carefully chosen colors, and a designed template can render as a stack of empty boxes on somebody’s work laptop. Text-based cuts survive all of it. Bold, bullets, short lines and white space look right in every client, in both color schemes, with images turned off, which is the whole reason the system in this chapter has outlived a decade of platform changes.

Then there is the new thing. **A human email cuts, and a generated one drones.** A lot of the promotional mail arriving now reads like it was written by a machine, and that kind of email has a shape you can spot from across the room: long, even paragraphs of near-identical length, an unbroken pleasant tone, no bold anywhere, no fragments, nothing that sounds like it was typed by somebody with an opinion. It is grammatically flawless and it has no cuts in it at all. Which means a short, bossy, heavily bolded email from a persona with a name is now more distinct in an inbox than it was in 2013, not less. The competition got smoother and quieter. Be the one that moves.

None of this matters if nobody opens the thing. Chapter 15 is about the eight words that decide that.

## Do this Monday

- Open the last email you sent your list and count the cuts. Bold lines, bullets, one-line paragraphs, links. If there are fewer than one per three lines of text, rewrite it.
- Write the bold lines of your next email first, five to nine words each, before you write a single paragraph around them.
- Read those bold lines out loud to someone who does not work with you and ask them what you want them to do.
- Cut your next draft by 40 percent, then check the word count. Get it under 200.
- Put a blank line between every paragraph, including the one-liners, then send the draft to yourself and read it on your phone.
- Find the one instruction in the email and rewrite it as an order with a deadline. Delete any second ask.

# Subject Lines

Pick up your phone and look at the lock screen before you swipe it open. Mine had a stack of notifications on it: texts, bank alerts, a delivery photo of my own front door, and a handful of emails buried in the pile.

I cleared the whole screen with one swipe. I could not tell you who sent any of those emails.

That swipe is what every email you write has to survive first. In Chapter 14 I told you that television trained us to expect a cut every five to ten seconds, and that when it doesn't happen then we bolt, change the channel or in our case... delete the email. The subject line is the first cut. It happens before the bold text, before the bullets, before the step-by-step instructions, before any of the work you just did.

**Bottom line:** The subject line has exactly one job, which is getting the email opened, and it is the last thing you write. It is not a summary, it is not a headline, and it is not where you get to be funny. It is a label on the outside of the box, read in under a second by somebody whose thumb is already moving, sitting next to the persona's name in the From line, which is doing more of the work than the subject is.

## Write it last

Write the email, then write the subject line.  
**The subject line is a label, and you cannot label a box you have not packed.**

I have watched people open a blank document, type six subject line candidates, argue about them for half a meeting, and then go write an email that ended up being about something else entirely. The email that survives a draft is never the email you set out to write. You cut two paragraphs, you find the one line that actually lands, and now the subject you spent forty minutes on is a label for a box you threw away.

When you do it in the right order, the subject is usually already sitting in the copy. Look at the Pain email in Chapter 11. Sarah opens it with "One question I get a lot is why did I start this free online dating tip website?" There is the subject line, sitting in the first sentence: **Why I started this site.** Twenty-three characters, no invention required, and it matches the email exactly, which is the part that matters.

An email whose subject promises one thing and delivers another gets opened once and unsubscribed from once. You do not get a second trade.

## Forty characters, one idea

**Keep it under about forty characters and keep it to one idea.** Forty is a rule of thumb, not a law, and it comes from where the text gets cut off on a phone held in one hand. Longer subjects do get opened. They also get truncated, and you do not control where the cut lands.

Count the characters. Actually count them, do not eyeball it.

“Your free sandwich coupon” is twenty-five characters. That was the subject line on the email that carried the Bait for the sandwich franchise in Chapter 3, and it is just the bait said out loud with no decoration on it.

“Don’t do this on a first date” is twenty-nine.

“Holy Crap” is nine.

The one-idea rule has an easy test attached. If your subject line contains the word “and,” delete everything from the “and” onward and read what is left. Nine times out of ten it is better, because the second idea was there to make you feel like the email was worth sending. “The dating guide is ready and here are 3 tips for your profile” is two emails wearing one coat. Send the second one on Thursday.

## The rest of the envelope

**The From line is doing more work than the subject, so stop rewriting the subject and go fix the From line.**

On a phone the sender name is usually the bolder, bigger piece of text. It is the first thing the eye lands on, and by the time a subscriber is on Day 7 of the Sequence it is the only thing they actually recognize.

Set the From name to the persona and nothing else. Sarah James. Not “Sarah James | Online Dating Tips,” not “Online Dating Tips Newsletter,” not the company. Chapter 5 covers why the persona is a person; the From line is where that decision either shows up or quietly gets undone by whoever set up the account. Then leave it alone forever. Changing the From name halfway through a sequence is the fastest way to turn a familiar sender into a stranger.

The preview text is the second subject line. It is the gray line of text under the subject in the inbox list, somewhere between thirty and ninety characters depending on the app, and most platforms have a field for it. If you leave that field empty, the app grabs the first words in the body of your email, which is how a professionally written email ends up sitting in an inbox reading “View in browser. Having trouble reading this message?”

Write it as the sentence after the subject, not as a repeat of it. Subject: “Why I started this site.” Preview: “It is kind of a bummer, honestly.” Now the two lines together are a tiny piece of copy doing a job, and you got it for free because the field was already sitting there.

## Clear beats clever

Curiosity      beats      cleverness,      and      clarity      beats      both.  
**Say the thing plainly and you will win more opens than you will with a pun.**

Clever is the trap because clever is fun to write. A pun on the name of your product reads as an advertisement, which tells the reader this is work email from a brand, which sends it to the swipe. A plain sentence from a human being reads like a note. “I owe you an apology” gets opened. “Sale-abration Time!!” gets swiped, and it earns it.

Curiosity works when the gap it opens is real and the email closes it in the first two lines. “I stopped recommending the thing I sold you” makes me open it. If the email never explains, I have been played, and I will remember the sender name next time. Every open you take with a trick is borrowed from the next one.

Skip the things that both filters and humans have been trained on: ALL CAPS, three exclamation points, FREE!!!, a dollar sign stuck to a number, and a fake “Re:” or “Fwd:” in front of an email that is not a reply to anything. Modern filters score a whole message and a whole sending reputation rather than hunting single words, so one dollar sign will not sink you by itself. Chapter 17 covers the plumbing. The human filter is the one you should be scared of, because it runs faster and it never appeals.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** If I had to name the best subject line ever written, it might be a movie title: “Snakes on a Plane.” Four words. No adjectives, no cleverness, no wordplay. It tells you the entire product and it makes you want it anyway. That is the bar. Almost nothing you write will clear it. Try anyway.

## The Sequence, subject by subject

The twenty-day Sequence in Chapters 18 and 19 named its own subject lines in 2013 and I never noticed until I reread this thing to republish it. The internal name I gave each email is the subject line. Here is the run:

- Day 14: Email 6, Gift day 1 Intro
- Day 16: Email 7, Gift day 2 Holy Crap
- Day 17: Email 8, Gift day 3 Don’t Forget
- Day 18: Email 9, Gift day 4 Today’s the Last Day

- Day 18: Email 10, Gift last reminder

**The volume goes up one notch per email, and the subject lines are where you can hear it.**

Intro is calm and says what is coming. Holy Crap is the reaction, not the offer, which is why it works. Don't Forget is a nudge from somebody who assumes you meant to act. Today's the Last Day is a fact with a clock on it, and the last reminder a few hours later is the shortest email in the whole run.

That is the same subtle-to-dramatic curve the 3 Persuasive P's run on in Chapter 13, applied to nine words at a time. Chapter 19 is where the Gift days themselves live; I am only pointing at their labels.

The earlier subjects follow the same logic of saying what is inside. Day 1 is the double opt-in, and a subject like "Confirm your email to get the guide" is the kind of instruction that day calls for, because on that one day the subject is a set of directions. Day 7 is the feedback email from Chapter 9, where a subject as plain as "Can I get your honest opinion?" does the job, since the request is the entire email. Day 11 delivers the poll results, and something like "Here is what everybody said" fits the moment.

I am writing those three as examples, not quoting them off a 2013 screenshot. The thing to steal is the logic underneath: the subject repeats the one job the email does.

## **Two subjects and a slice**

Write two subject lines for any email going to more than about a thousand people, send each one to a slice of the list, and send the winner to everybody else. **Let the list pick, then stop picking at it.** Most platforms will run this for you; the setting is usually called a split test or an A/B test, and the defaults are fine.

A common split is something like ten percent to each subject line, with the winner going out to the rest after a few hours. Treat those numbers as a starting point rather than a rule, and adjust them to the size of your list and how fast your people actually read. Test one thing at a time, which means the two subjects should differ in one way, not in five. Curious against plain. Short against long. Question against statement.

Then stop when the difference is noise, and noise is most of it. If the A slice pulled 41 opens and the B slice pulled 38, you learned nothing and you are about to write a paragraph in a report explaining an eight percent lift that is really three people. My rule of thumb is a few hundred opens on each side before I will believe a winner, and on a list under a thousand I do not run the test at all, because I am reading static and static will happily tell me whatever I already believed.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Two days after a send, take everybody who did not open it, write a new subject line, and send the exact same email again. New label, same box. It costs you one sentence of work and it routinely picks up a chunk of the audience that was in line at the airport the first time. The caveat is that “did not open” is a soft number now, because mail privacy features pre-load images for the reader and some of your opens are machines rather than people. Chapter 21 is where I get into what to measure instead, and clicks are most of the answer.

That is the last of the copy. The next six chapters are the machine that sends it, starting with which software to rent.

## Do this Monday

- Open the last three emails you sent and count the characters in each subject line. Rewrite any that run past forty, and delete everything after the first “and.”
- Check the From name on your sending account right now. If it says anything other than your persona’s name, fix it and never touch it again.
- Fill in the preview text field on every email in your Sequence, and confirm none of them start with “View in browser.”
- Write the subject lines for the five Gift day emails using the 2013 names as your style guide: Intro, Holy Crap, Don’t Forget, Today’s the Last Day, and the last reminder.
- Set up one split test on your next send, ten percent against ten percent, and write down the two subjects and both open counts in the same file where you keep your quotes.
- Schedule the non-opener resend for two days after your next broadcast, with a second subject line written at the same time as the first.

## **PART VI: THE MACHINE**

# Platforms and Plain Text

I have used over 20 different email platforms.

In 2013, when I got to this part of the guide, I listed two of them. The first one was PAR Program, which was my own company, and the second was Aweber. That is a hell of a recommendation list from a guy who had logged into twenty different control panels. I told you to use the software I owned, and then in November 2015 I sold that software to GoSocial and stopped thinking about it.

So read the next few pages the way you would read a restaurant review from thirteen years ago. The building might still be there. The chef is not.

**Bottom line:** Maybe you already have one you like? If so, that is great. If not, then you are going to need one and fast. Pick it off a short list of features, not off a brand, because the platform is rented and the list is yours. Then send rich text pasted into plain text, so what lands in the inbox looks like a person typed it instead of a company approving it.

## What I said in 2013

Here is what the PAR Program page said, in the past tense where it belongs. It was engineered with enterprise scalability but designed for marketers to gain true insight on their most sought-after audience groups. Our tools focused on helping to manage an efficient conversion funnel leading to scalable customer acquisition for every campaign.

Read that sentence again. That is brochure copy, written under my name, about a product I sold. Back in Chapter 4 I told you that people never buy a product for what it does, and then I described my own product entirely in terms of what it did.

**I broke my own rule in my own book,** which is the kind of thing you only notice when you come back to it thirteen years later.

The other one was Aweber, and what I wrote was this: for people who can do their own copywriting, graphics, programming, then Aweber is the solution for you. I also wrote down two downsides. They had been hacked in the past and people's data had been compromised. And like many other public platforms, you are going to have issues getting through spam filters from time to time. Then I closed it out: if you are just getting started and have the resources to do everything yourself, then I highly recommend Aweber.

Every word of that is a photograph of 2013. I am not updating it and I am not scrubbing it, because the shape of the advice is still right even though the names in it have moved on. The do-it-yourself person needs different software than the company with a designer on payroll, and both of them are going to fight the spam folder. That second problem got its own chapter, which is the next one.

## Rented software, owned list

The software is rented. The list is the asset.

Test that on a Tuesday afternoon. Log into whatever you use now and export your subscribers to a CSV file. Open it. You want an address per row, the date they opted in, the bait they opted in for, and every tag you have hung on them since. If that file exists on your laptop, you own your business. If the export is a support ticket, a 48-hour wait, or a plan upgrade, you do not own your business, you are a tenant who has been paying rent for so long he started calling it a mortgage.

I have moved lists between platforms more times than I can count across those twenty-plus accounts, and the move itself is not the hard part. The hard part is that the tags often do not come with it, and a list without tags is just a pile of addresses. You lose which bait they took, which is the whole reason you know what to send them next.

So the export test is the first thing I check, before pricing, before the editor, before anything. **Run it once a month and keep the file.** Not because your provider is going to vanish, but because a billing card expires, an account gets flagged by an automated system on a Saturday, and you find out how much of your company lives on somebody else's server.

## Five features, then stop shopping

The sequence in Chapter 18 is ten emails, sent on days 1, 2, 4, 7, 11, 14, 16, 17, and twice on 18, with a Special Report on day 20. That is the only spec sheet you need to shop against. Here is the checklist.

**Automation by day and by tag.** The platform has to let a person opt in at 2am on a Thursday and start on Day 1 of their own private calendar, not on your newsletter calendar. Day 2 is two days after they joined, not two days after you clicked send. It also has to branch on a tag, because somebody who took the dating guide and somebody who took the fake-profile guide should not get an identical Day 4. If the tool calls this a workflow, a drip, a campaign, an automation or a flow, they are all the same thing with different marketing names on it.

**A template that looks like plain text.** There has to be a send option with no header image, no logo bar, no two-column layout and no background color. Some platforms bury this and call it the simple or text template. If you cannot find it in the editor in five minutes, that platform is built for retailers sending catalogs, and you are not doing that.

**One-click list export.** Covered above. Addresses, dates, tags, in a file, now.

**Deliverability reporting.** You need to see bounces, complaints and unsubscribes as numbers you can look at on a Monday. Chapter 17 is about what those numbers mean and what to do when they go the wrong way, and you cannot do any of it if the dashboard only shows you opens and a pretty graph.

**One-click unsubscribe support.** The big mailbox providers have published bulk-sender requirements, and a working unsubscribe header is part of them. The platform should add it for you without you thinking about it. If you have to ask support whether they support it, that is your answer.

Every mainstream platform in 2026 passes all five. That is the actual state of things and it is why I am not naming a winner. The market caught up. Pick on price, on whether the automation builder makes sense to you in the first twenty minutes, and on whether a human answers support. Then quit shopping, because you have ten emails to write and the software is not what is stopping you.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** About that “they have been hacked” line I put next to Aweber in 2013. Plenty of companies in this business have had a bad day since 2013, and a thirteen-year-old memory is a lousy basis for a decision you are making this week. So do not carry my line around as a grudge against one company. Ask the question properly instead. Has this provider had a breach, what did they publish about it, and do they offer two-factor authentication on the account that can export my entire list? Turn that on today. The person who wants your subscriber file does not want to break the software, he wants to guess one password.

## Rich text pasted into plain text

**ShoeMoney Tip:** I always am asked if I like to use html or plain text emails. I have always had the most success with Rich Text and plain text. I use Rich Text just so I can take advantage of bullet points, bold fonts, highlighting and other various techniques. But, I then paste that into the plain text. I have never done well with creating an aesthetically eye-appealing template. It actually seems to cause way more problems than it’s worth.

Here is what that looks like as a procedure, because it is the center of this chapter and it is thirty seconds of work.

Draft the email somewhere you can see it. Bold the two phrases a skimmer has to read, per Chapter 14. Bullet the steps you want them to take. Double space between key points, even if it is just a one liner. Read it back and cut the parts that made you feel like a writer.

Then paste it into the plain text version of the platform and send it. Not into the drag-and-drop builder. Into the simple template, the one that looks like a Gmail window with your words in it.

What you are sending is one column, black text on white, one link, your persona's name at the bottom. Bold survives. Bullets survive. Your name in the From line, which does more work than anything else in the message, survives. What does not survive is the 600-pixel header graphic with the logo in it, and that is the point.

## Why the designed template loses

A designed template loses because of where it gets opened. **It gets opened on a phone, one-handed, next to forty other notifications.** A two-column layout collapses into something with a horizontal scroll bar, the hero image sits there as a gray box until the reader taps to load images, and dark mode turns your careful white background into a floating white rectangle with a halo around it.

Then there is what it says before anybody reads a word. A header graphic and a footer with social icons is the visual signature of a company blasting a list. A plain message from Sarah with one bold line in it is the visual signature of a person who wrote to you. You spent five chapters building a persona who is a friend and a mentor. Do not put her behind a billboard.

It also costs you time you do not have. Every hour spent nudging a template is an hour not spent writing the Day 7 poll, and the poll is what produces the testimonials that make the Day 11 email work.

One exception, and it is real: the Buy Now button. Chapter 20 walks through the template we used for blu in 2013, which had a large bold Buy Now button down the left side. One button or one bold link inside an otherwise plain email is not a designed template. It is a door.

Now, the thing I waved at in 2013 and never explained, that you are going to have issues getting through spam filters from time to time. That is the next chapter, and it is the difference between a sequence that works and a sequence that nobody ever saw.

## Do this Monday

- Export your list to a CSV file and open it. Confirm you have addresses, opt-in dates and tags. If any of those three are missing, that is your week.
- Turn on two-factor authentication for every account that can export that list, including the account of anyone on your team who has admin access.
- Find the plain text or simple template in your platform's editor. Time yourself. If it takes more than five minutes, ask support where it is.
- Build one test automation that fires Day 1 and Day 2 emails off an opt-in, sign up with your own address, and watch the timing work.
- Take the last email you sent, paste it into the plain template with bold and bullets only, and send both versions to yourself. Open them on your phone.

# Deliverability and List Hygiene

A sequence sitting in the spam folder produces the exact same dashboard as a sequence nobody likes. The opens sag, the clicks sag, sales go flat and stay flat, and your platform reports every message as delivered the entire time, because the receiving server really did accept it. It accepted it and filed it where no human will ever look.

I have watched people chase that ghost for weeks, and I have been one of them. They rewrite the subject lines. They rewrite the Day 14 offer. They argue about send times. Then they start in on the opt-in page. Nobody signs up a brand new Gmail address and looks at which folder the mail lands in, because that is the dumb, boring, five-minute idea, and the dumb boring idea is the one that is right.

This is not one company's horror story. It is the default outcome of ignoring the plumbing, and it is quiet enough that the smartest person in the room misses it for a month.

**Bottom line:** Every chapter before this one assumes your email shows up in an inbox. That assumption is a piece of plumbing, and plumbing fails quietly. Authenticate your sending domain, send from a subdomain you can afford to burn, keep complaints far under the line the big mailbox providers publish, give every email a working one-click unsubscribe, and cut dead addresses on a schedule. A smaller list that lands beats a bigger list in the spam folder every single time, and it is not close.

## Plumbing fails quietly

In 2013 I wrote one sentence about this and moved on. I was writing about Aweber and I said that like many other public platforms, **you are going to have issues getting through spam filters from time to time**. That was true, it was useless, and it is the only part of the original guide I am genuinely embarrassed about. "From time to time" describes weather. It does not describe a system with rules you can follow.

Here is the part that makes deliverability different from everything else in this book. A bad subject line tells you it is bad: the open number drops, you see it that afternoon, you fix it. A weak offer tells you the same way, on the same timescale. Spam placement tells you nothing, because the numbers it moves are identical to the numbers a boring email moves, and every one of those numbers has ten innocent explanations. You will work through all ten before you think to check the pipes.

**The failure is silent by design.** Mailbox providers do not send you a notice saying your mail is being filtered, because telling spammers exactly what tripped the filter is how you teach spammers to avoid the filter. So the feedback you get is a shrug, and the shrug looks like an audience that stopped caring.

That is why deliverability sits here, in front of the Sequence, instead of in an appendix. Chapter 21 has a failure ladder for “it stopped converting” and this chapter is the first rung. Check the pipes before you rewrite a word.

## Prove the mail is yours

The whole authentication problem is one sentence: the receiving server needs to know that the machine sending mail with your name on it is a machine you approved. You answer that with three DNS records, and if you have never touched DNS, this is a twenty-minute job at your domain registrar, not a project.

**SPF** is a text record on your domain that lists who is allowed to send mail as you. Your email platform publishes the exact line to paste. One SPF record per domain, and it has to include every service that sends on your behalf, so if your platform sends the Sequence and your shopping cart sends receipts, both go in the same record.

**DKIM** is a cryptographic signature on every message. Your platform gives you a key to publish, usually as a CNAME, and then it signs outgoing mail with the matching private key. The receiver checks the signature against your published key and knows the body was not touched in transit and the sender is who it says.

**DMARC** is the record that ties SPF and DKIM to the From address a human actually sees, and tells receivers what to do when the check fails. Start at `p=none` with a reporting address, which means “do not block anything, just tell me what is happening.” Read the reports for two weeks. Then move to `p=quarantine` and later `p=reject` once you are sure nothing legitimate is failing.

**All three or none of it counts.** The bulk-sender requirements Google and Yahoo both published in 2024, and which you can still read on their own developer pages today, made SPF, DKIM and DMARC the price of admission for anyone sending volume. The number they put on “volume” was 5,000 messages a day to their users. Your list will cross that faster than you think, and there is no reason to be on the wrong side of it. Set the records on day one when it takes twenty minutes, not in month four when your mail is already being filtered and you are trying to dig out.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** From 1999 to 2003 I was a Senior Linux Security Engineer at Wells Fargo Financial, which meant I spent a lot of nights inside mail servers. Back then the entire trust model was “this machine says it is who it says it is,” and that is exactly why spam ate the internet. Everything in this section exists because that assumption was a disaster. When you publish a DKIM key you are doing the thing we all should have been doing in 2001.

## The subdomain you can burn

Send your marketing mail from a subdomain, not from your main domain. If your business is example.com, the Sequence goes out from mail.example.com or news.example.com, and your invoices, your password resets and the email you type by hand keep going out from example.com.

**Reputation is scored per sending domain**, which is the entire reason to do this. If something goes sideways on the marketing side, a bad list import, a run of complaints, a compromised account, an intern with a spreadsheet and good intentions, the damage lands on news.example.com and your ability to email a customer an order confirmation is untouched. You can burn the subdomain and stand up a new one. You cannot burn example.com.

A brand new sending domain has no reputation at all, and that gets treated with suspicion rather than trust. So warm it up. Start small, a few hundred messages a day, and send those first to the people most likely to open and click: the ones who signed up in the last week. Grow the daily volume over two to four weeks. What you are doing is showing Gmail and Microsoft a pattern of mail that humans actually want, before you ask them to accept ten thousand messages at once.

The classic way to kill a new domain, and I am describing the shape of the mistake rather than pointing at anybody, is to take a list that has sat in a spreadsheet for three years, say 40,000 addresses, load it into the fresh domain and blast the whole thing on a Tuesday. Half those addresses are dead, some have been recycled into spam traps, and the pattern you just showed every mailbox provider on earth is the pattern a spammer shows: no history, then instant volume, then bounces. You are filtered by Wednesday, and you spent a new domain to learn something you could have read in a paragraph.

Sign up for Google Postmaster Tools and Microsoft SNDS while you are in there. Both are free, both want DNS verification you are already doing, and Postmaster Tools is the only place you get to see your Gmail spam-complaint rate as a number instead of a guess.

## Complaints are the score

The complaint rate is the one number that decides whether your mail keeps landing, and you control it with copy decisions, not with technology. **A complaint is a reader hitting the spam button**, and every one of them is a vote from a real human that your mail should not exist.

Google and Yahoo's published bulk-sender requirements put the hard line at 0.3 percent and name 0.1 percent as the level to stay under. Those are their numbers, published by them, not a rule of thumb I made up. Run the math on a 10,000-person send: 0.1 percent is ten people. Thirty people can put you over the published threshold. This is not a big statistical cushion, it is a handful of annoyed subscribers on any given Tuesday.

People hit spam for boring reasons. They do not remember signing up, because the Bait was on a page they visited eight weeks ago. They cannot find the unsubscribe link. They clicked the unsubscribe link and it did not work, or it asked them to log in, or it made them pick from seven checkboxes. Every one of those is a design choice you made.

So: give every email a one-click unsubscribe that works, in the headers and in the body. The header version is `List-Unsubscribe` plus `List-Unsubscribe-Post`, which is what makes Gmail and Apple Mail show their own unsubscribe button at the top of the message. Any mainstream platform sets those for you if you turn the feature on. The body version is a plain link that says Unsubscribe, near the bottom, in readable type. Do not hide it at 8 point grey on white, because the person who cannot find it does not give up. They hit the spam button instead, and that costs you a hundred times more than losing them.

Honor every unsubscribe immediately, the same day, no confirmation page, no "are you sure," no survey. The published requirements say process it within two days. Do it in two seconds.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Before a Sequence goes live, create a brand new Gmail account and a brand new Outlook account, sign both up through your real opt-in form, and let the whole twenty-day run play out to them. Fresh accounts, not your accounts, because your accounts have years of history telling the filter you like this sender. Then look at where each email landed: Inbox, Promotions, Spam. That test costs you twenty minutes and catches the silent failure I opened this chapter with on day one instead of day forty.

## Hygiene starts on Day 1

The list you keep clean is the list that keeps landing, and the first filter is the first email in the Sequence.

Day 1: Email 1, Double opt in confirmation.

I gave that line in 2013 as a structure decision. It is a deliverability decision too. In Chapter 4, Results, Not Benefits, I wrote that some people guard their email addresses carefully, and other people make up fake ones just to use for online forms. Double opt-in is what separates the two groups before they ever touch your reputation. The fake address never confirms, so it never enters your list, so it never bounces and never drags your numbers down. The confirmation click is also the cleanest proof of permission you will ever have, which matters the day somebody accuses you of spamming them.

Then run these rules and stop thinking about them:

- **Hard bounces come off automatically.** An address that returns “no such user” is dead. One strike, remove. Soft bounces (full mailbox, server down) get a few tries over a couple of weeks, then out.
- **No opens and no clicks in about 90 days gets a re-permission email.** Ninety days is my rule of thumb, not a law. Adjust it to your send frequency. The re-permission email is one short note saying you noticed they have not read anything in a while and here is the link to keep getting it. No click, they come off.
- **Purchased lists never get loaded.** Not a rented list, not a “co-registration” list, not a spreadsheet a partner swears is opted in. Those lists carry spam traps, which are addresses that exist only to catch senders like you, and hitting one can put your domain on a blocklist in a single send.
- **Never re-add someone who left.** They unsubscribed, and putting them back is the fastest complaint you will ever generate.

Open rate is a softer signal than it used to be. Apple’s Mail Privacy Protection, which shipped in 2021 and is on for anyone who tapped through the setup screen without reading it, pre-loads images and marks a message opened whether or not a human looked. A chunk of your open rate is a machine. Clicks are the harder number, because a click takes a finger. When you decide whether to sunset an address, weigh a click far more than an open.

## A smaller list that lands

Cutting subscribers feels like cutting money, which is why almost nobody does it until a provider forces them to. Run the arithmetic and it flips. Ten thousand addresses where 4,000 are dead, sent into filters that are watching your engagement rate, gets fewer people reading you than 6,000 addresses that land in the inbox. You did not lose 4,000 customers when you removed them. You lost 4,000 addresses that were already not reading you and were actively teaching Gmail to distrust the ones who were.

My own newsletter number from Chapter 10 is the one I keep coming back to: about \$55 a subscriber over the life of one list. If a quarter of that list had been sitting in a spam folder, the money does not drop by a quarter, because filtering is not linear. Dead weight drags delivery down for the live addresses sitting next to it.

With the plumbing sound, we can go build the thing that runs through it. Chapter 18 walks Days 1 through 7 of the Sequence, one email at a time.

## Do this Monday

- Publish SPF, DKIM and DMARC for your sending domain. Start DMARC at `p=none` with a reporting address, read two weeks of reports, then tighten it.
- Move the Sequence to a subdomain (news.example.com) and leave transactional mail on the main domain.
- Verify your domain in Google Postmaster Tools and Microsoft SNDS and write down today's spam-complaint rate so you have a baseline.
- Turn on one-click unsubscribe in your platform, then send yourself a test and actually click both the header button and the body link to confirm they work.
- Set the automatic rules: hard bounces removed on the first strike, no open or click in 90 days triggers a re-permission email, no response to that removes the address.
- Open a fresh Gmail and a fresh Outlook account, sign them up through your live opt-in form, and note which folder each of the ten emails lands in.

# The Sequence, Days 1 to 7

The whole thing fit on one page near the back of the 2013 white paper. Days down the left margin, Day 1 through Day 20, ten emails listed next to them, no diagram and no arrows. That page is the one I remember people asking me about. Everything before it was setup.

The first email on that page goes out the second somebody hits submit. Not the next morning, not in a Tuesday batch, not when you get around to it. The address lands in the database and the email is already gone.

**Bottom line:** The first week of the Sequence does four jobs, and selling is not one of them. Day 1 confirms the address and hands over the Bait. Day 2 and Day 4 give something usable and point at one product. Day 7 asks what they thought. Nobody gets pitched for fourteen days, and the reason the Gift days in Chapter 19 convert at all is that the first seven days spent the whole time depositing instead of withdrawing.

## The page from the white paper

So we've gone through many of the basics, including:

- How to start building a subscription list
- How to develop your own persona
- The most powerful copywriting and selling methods
- Examples of emails I use that really work

Now look at the basic structure of the email sequence that I have developed over the years.

*Day 1: Email 1, Double opt in confirmation*

*Day 2: Email 2, Value + recommendation with affiliate links*

*Day 4: Email 3, Value + recommendation with affiliate links*

*Day 7: Poll or feedback*

*Day 11: Email 5, Poll Results, Thanks + Bonus Offer*

*Day 14: Email 6, Gift day 1 Intro*

*Day 16: Email 7, Gift day 2 Holy Crap*

*Day 17: Email 8, Gift day 3 Don't Forget*

*Day 18: Email 9, Gift day 4 Today's the Last Day*

*Day 18: Email 10, Gift last reminder.*

*Day 20: Special Report*

This chapter is the top half of that page. Days 11 through 20 get Chapter 19. Ten numbered emails plus the Special Report on Day 20 makes eleven sends; when I say ten emails anywhere in this book, the Special Report rides along.

**The gaps between the days are the part people change first and should change last.** Day 2 lands while the Bait is still fresh and the person still remembers signing up for it. Day 4 lands before the guide stops feeling recent, while a free download on a phone is still something they did rather than something they once did. Day 7 lands after they have had a real week to use the thing, which is the only point at which their opinion of it is worth collecting.

Decide daily email will build the relationship faster, mail your new list every morning, and you find out that a stranger who downloaded a PDF did not sign up for a pen pal. The unsubscribes start before you have said anything worth unsubscribing from. Stretch it the other way, one email a week because you do not want to bother anybody, and by the second month you are writing to people with no memory of the guide, the persona, or the box they typed their address into. One and two and three is the smallest gap that does not feel like harassment and the largest one that does not need an introduction.

## **Day 1 is the welcome email**

Day 1: Email 1, Double opt in confirmation.

In 2013 I wrote that on one line and moved on, which was lazy of me, because this email does more work than any other email in the run and it is the one most people get wrong.

Here is the mechanic. The person fills in the box, and the box does not trust them yet. Anybody can type anybody's address, and a share of them will type a fake one on purpose to grab your Bait without giving up a real inbox. So the platform mails a confirmation, and the click on the confirm link is the moment the subscriber actually exists. Nothing else in the Sequence starts until that click happens.

**The confirm email gets exactly one link and nothing else worth clicking.** Three lines, the persona's name at the bottom, one link in the middle:

*Hey, it's Sarah. Click this and I'll send you the Complete Dating Guide right now.*

*==> [Yourlinkhere.com/confirm](#)*

*If you didn't ask for this, ignore it and you'll never hear from me again.*

*Sarah James*

That is the entire email. No menu bar, no social icons, no "while you're here, check out our blog", no second link to the guide itself. Put the guide link in the confirmation email and a good chunk of your list will grab the guide, never click confirm, and sit in your platform as unconfirmed forever, which means they get nothing else you ever send.

The click lands them on a page with the Bait on it, and the welcome email follows about sixty seconds later carrying the same Bait link, because half of them will close that page before the download finishes and will go looking in their inbox for it. Count the confirmation and the welcome as one item on the calendar, because the subscriber experiences it as one thing: I asked for the guide, I clicked, I got the guide. That is also why the white paper lists them on one line as Day 1.

The welcome email does three more jobs while it has their full attention, and it will never have their full attention like this again.

It delivers the Bait in the first two lines, above anything else. Not after a greeting, not after a paragraph about how excited the team is. The first thing on the screen is the thing they asked for.

It says who is talking. One or two sentences of the Reluctant Hero from Chapter 8, in the persona's own voice, with the persona's name on it. This is the From line they will see nine more times over the next three weeks, so it gets a face here or it never gets one.

It says what shows up and when. "Over the next couple of weeks I'll send you about ten emails. Some are tips, one is me asking what you thought, and one is a thing I only open up for four days." That sentence is the single cheapest piece of insurance in this whole system. A person who was told to expect ten emails does not mark the fourth one as spam. A person who was told nothing marks it as spam, and your delivery into everybody else's inbox gets a little worse because of it.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Count the clickable things in your welcome email. If the answer is more than one, you are running a test you did not mean to run, and the winner is going to be your logo linking back to your homepage. Cut it to one link, the one you actually want clicked, and cut the rest. The footer unsubscribe link stays, always, and it does not count.

## Value with a recommendation

Day 2: Email 2, Value + recommendation with affiliate links. Day 4: Email 3, Value + recommendation with affiliate links.

Same instruction twice, and the instruction has two halves that people collapse into one. Value means the email is useful if the reader never clicks anything. Recommendation means there is exactly one product in it, named, with one link, described as the thing the persona uses.

**The value half has to stand alone.** Not a teaser for the value. Not "I wrote a post about this, click to read it." Three or four specific things the reader can do, in the body of the email, in plain text, finishable in the time they are standing in line. If your Bait was the Complete Dating Guide, Day 2 is the three profile photos that get the most replies and why the group shot is not one of them. The reader gets to the bottom having learned something whether or not they ever touch your link.

The recommendation half is one sentence and one link, and it sits at the bottom because that is where a recommendation belongs when the email was not about selling. "The only thing I pay for is X, because it does the one thing I could never do by hand." One product. Not a list of five with your favorite at the top. A person who recommends five things has recommended nothing.

Now look at what these two emails are actually doing under the value, because it is Part IV wearing different clothes. Day 2 is Pain from Chapter 11, told as a tip. The photo advice only means anything because the reader is currently getting no replies and knows it, and every line of the tip reminds them of that without ever saying the words “you are getting no replies.” Day 4 is Potential from Chapter 12, told as a tip. This is what happens when the profile works, described as a normal Tuesday rather than a fantasy.

That is the whole trick of the first week. The 3 Persuasive P’s are running the entire time. They are just running at a volume the reader does not register as selling, which is the subtle end of subtle to dramatic from Chapter 13. By Day 14 the same three moves are running loud, and they land because the reader has already agreed with the quiet version twice.

Every one of those links in 2013 had an affiliate id hanging off the end of it, and that is how the free guide got paid for. I ran affiliate offers for years and I am done with that business, so I am not going to sell you on it here. The structure is what transfers. Whether the link goes to somebody else’s checkout with your id on it or to your own product with a tracking tag on it, the email is built the same: useful on its own, one product, one link, in the persona’s voice, at the bottom.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** The guy at the hardware store who walks you to the aisle, hands you the eleven dollar part, and tells you that you do not need the forty dollar one is running Day 2. You will drive past two other stores to get back to him. He did not sell you anything that trip and he got you for the next ten years.

## Day 7 is the poll

Day 7: Poll or feedback.

Count the emails on that page and you will notice the poll does not get a number. I listed Email 1, Email 2, Email 3, then “Poll or feedback”, then Email 5. Email 4 is the poll. I shipped a white paper with a number missing out of the middle of my own system, and there it is in print, still missing, in this edition.

It is the Hi Sam email from Chapter 9, so I am not going to write it twice. What matters here is the position. **Day 7 is the hinge between the giving half and the asking half.** Everything before it was outbound. Everything after it uses what comes back.

The answers you collect on Day 7 become the Proof email later, become the “here is what you all said” of Day 11, and become the reason the Gift on Day 14 is aimed at the thing your list actually complained about instead of the thing you assumed. A list that has written to you once is a different list. The person who typed three sentences to Sarah on Day 7 is not going to read Sarah’s Day 16 email like a stranger.

## One workflow, delays in days

In 2026 this whole chapter is one automation in whatever platform you are on, and it has five moving parts.

The trigger is the confirm click, never the form submit. Somebody who never confirms never enters the Sequence, which is the list hygiene from Chapter 17 doing its job at the front door instead of the back.

The delays are relative, measured in days from the trigger. One day, then two, then three. Never calendar dates. The person who signs up at 11pm on a Thursday in March has to get the same run as the person who signs up at lunch in October, or you are writing ten emails a month for the rest of your life.

The From name and address are the persona, identical on all ten emails, on an address that receives replies and is read by a human. A persona mailing from no-reply has told the reader it is a robot before the first sentence.

Every link carries a tag that identifies the email it came from. Day 2 value link, Day 2 recommendation link, Day 4 recommendation link, each one distinct. Do it while you are building the workflow, because nobody ever goes back and adds tags to a running sequence, and without them Chapter 21 has nothing to read.

The exit conditions get set at the same time as the delays. Somebody who buys on Day 4 should not get the Day 14 email that offers them the thing they already own. Somebody who replies to the Day 7 poll should still get Day 11, because Day 11 is the thank-you they were promised.

Build it once, run your own address through it with the delays cut to minutes, and read all four emails on a phone. Day 11 is where it starts asking for money.

## Do this Monday

- Write the confirm email: three lines, one link, the persona's name. Delete every other clickable thing in it.
- Write the welcome email with the Bait link in the first two lines, two sentences of who the persona is, and one sentence telling them how many emails are coming and over what period.
- Write Day 2 as a tip that is useful with zero clicks, then add one product, one link, at the bottom.

- Write Day 4 the same way, aimed at what life looks like when the problem is gone, and use a different product only if you genuinely use a different one.
- Build the workflow with a confirm-click trigger, delays of 1, 2 and 3 days, and a unique tag on every link before you turn it on.
- Send yourself through it with the delays set to five minutes and read all four emails on your phone before a single subscriber sees them.

# The Gift Days

In the 2013 white paper, Day 11 gets one line of type: “Day 11: Email 5, Poll Results, Thanks + Bonus Offer.” Eight words, sitting between the poll on Day 7 and the first Gift email on Day 14, with nothing underneath it explaining what it is for.

I wrote that line thinking of it as manners. You asked a few hundred people for feedback, so you write back and tell them what everybody said, because that is what a person does. It took me a couple of runs to notice that the manners email was beating emails I had spent a week writing.

Day 11 is a Proof email wearing a thank-you note, and I had it filed under housekeeping.

**Bottom line:** Days 11 to 20 are where the money in this Sequence actually is. Day 11 takes the feedback you collected on Day 7 and hands it back to the list as social proof, with a small first ask attached. Then the paid offer runs as a Gift: four emails over five days plus a last reminder the same evening the window closes, with the volume climbing and the gaps between sends getting shorter. Day 20 gives value away again so nobody finishes the run feeling milked.

## Proof in disguise

Three things happen in one email on Day 11, and they happen in this order: the results, the thanks, the offer.

**The results are the proof, and they only work if you show them.** Do not summarize the feedback. Print it. Open with the count, whatever the count is, because a real number is more convincing than an adjective. Nine replies is a number. Say nine. Then paste four of the actual responses with first names on them, typos included, line breaks included, the one from the guy who wrote three words and the one from the woman who wrote four paragraphs about her sister.

Include a negative one. Chapter 9 told you to ask for the bad on purpose, and this is the email where that pays off twice. A list of praise reads like a page the seller built. Praise with one “the videos would not play on my phone” sitting in the middle of it reads like a screenshot of a real inbox, and it makes every quote around it heavier.

Then the thanks, which is where the Reluctant Hero from Chapter 8 does his shrug. The persona is not thanking people for their business. The persona is a little knocked over that strangers took twenty minutes to write back, says so in one sentence, and does not milk it. Somebody who got out of the ditch and is surprised anyone noticed. That whole move costs two lines.

Last comes the bonus offer, and this is the first time in eleven days the Sequence has asked the reader to reach for a card. Keep it small and make it obviously connected to what the feedback asked for. Somebody in the poll said they wanted the phone version, so the bonus is the phone version, cheap or free with something. **The size of this ask sets the size of the ask on Day 14**, and a huge first ask on Day 11 poisons the Gift before it starts.

What goes wrong here is always the same. The writer paraphrases the feedback into a tidy paragraph, thanks everybody in the plural, and then attaches a full sales pitch with three bonuses and a comparison table. That is a completely different email and it reads like a completely different sender.

## The Gift is the offer

The Gift is your paid offer wrapped as a gift with a deadline on it. That is the whole trick and I am not going to dress it up.

Wrapping means you take something off it that the buyer can name. The price comes down, or you add the thing you normally charge for, or you open a door that is normally shut. What you cannot do is call the regular price a gift, because the reader has been getting free guides and real answers from this persona for two weeks and has calibrated on what free from you looks like.

**Both halves have to be real.** The gift is real if it costs you something: you eat the margin, or you include a bonus you paid to produce, or you cap the number because the thing genuinely does not scale past that. The deadline is real if the price actually goes back up when it passes and the link actually stops working. I have sent the Day 18 email, watched the window close, and let people who wrote in on Day 19 stay out. That is the one time it feels bad and the only reason it works the next time you run it, and you will run it again on this same list.

A fake deadline gets caught on the second cycle. Not by everybody. By the thirty people who bought last time and are now watching to see if you meant it, which is exactly the group you need on the next run.

## Day 14 and Day 16

The four Gift days are the 3 Persuasive P's from Part IV played at full volume across a calendar instead of inside one email.

**Day 14: Email 6, Gift day 1 Intro.** The job here is to name the gift and say why it is happening now. One line of pain to re-open the wound the run has been poking at since Day 2, then what the gift is in plain nouns, then the date and hour it ends, then one link. The “why now” can be small and true (a new version shipped, a supplier deal, a group that starts Monday) and it has to be there, because an offer with no reason behind it reads as a price that was always fake.

Do not stack. One gift, one link, one deadline. Every bonus you pile on this email trades a specific thing the reader can picture for a pile they have to evaluate.

**Day 16: Email 7, Gift day 2 Holy Crap.** Two days later, and the name in the original is the tone. Holy crap, look what happened. People took the gift, and here is what one of them said about it after two days with it.

This is the Proof email from Chapter 13 in its loudest form, and it carries the crowd as well as the person. Numbers if you have them, actual quotes if you have them, and the quotes come from real buyers because Chapter 9 is not optional. If this is your first run and nobody has bought yet, you still have the Day 7 poll sitting in a folder. Quote the poll replies instead, and say straight out that these are people using the free guide, not buyers. Borrowed proof that is labeled beats manufactured proof every time, and it is the only version you can still defend a year later when somebody asks you which customer said that. A quote you cannot produce the sender of is a quote that will eventually be requested, and Chapter 9 has the rest.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** Every town has the one store with a GOING OUT OF BUSINESS banner that has been up for so many years the vinyl has gone chalky. Everybody driving past has priced that banner correctly: it is wallpaper. Your fourth deadline email gets read against every deadline you have ever sent, so the first fake one you run costs you the real ones for a year.

## The last two days

**Day 17: Email 8, Gift day 3 Don't Forget.** Short. One link. No new argument, no new bonus, no story. Something like this, in the dating persona's voice:

*Jim, the guide goes back to full price tomorrow night and I did not want you to miss it because you were busy.*

*Here is the link: [Yourlinkhere.com/?affiliateid=something](http://Yourlinkhere.com/?affiliateid=something)*

*That is all I have for you today.*

*Talk soon, Sarah*

Under forty words, counting the link. The people who are going to buy off this email were already sold on Day 14 and just needed the thing in front of them on a day they had five free seconds. Everybody else reads it in the preview pane and never opens it, which costs you nothing.

**Day 18: Email 9, Gift day 4 Today's the Last Day.** Now you state the deadline as a fact. Not urgency language, not "don't miss out", not a countdown graphic. The time, the time zone, and what changes at that time. "The bonus session comes off at 11:59 tonight, Central, and the price goes to 197." Restate the gift in one line for anyone who joined the list late, then the link.

**Day 18: Email 10, Gift last reminder.** Same day, sent in the evening, three lines. This one exists because of a boring fact about human beings: most people who mean to do a thing today do it after dinner. Send it around the time your list is on the couch with a phone.

*Last call, Jim. The bonus comes off at midnight and I am turning the link off.*

*[Yourlinkhere.com/?affiliateid=something](http://Yourlinkhere.com/?affiliateid=something)*

*Sarah*

**Two emails in one day is the whole point of Day 18**, and it is the send people chicken out of. It is also routinely the biggest single revenue hour in the twenty days. The morning email tells them; the evening email catches them at the moment they can act.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Write the last reminder first. Before you draft Day 14, write the three lines you will send at 8pm on Day 18. If you cannot make a real, specific, factual sentence out of what changes at midnight, you do not have a Gift yet, you have a discount you were planning to fake a clock around.

## The cadence is the message

Look at the gaps: three days, two days, one day, one day, hours. The sends get closer together as the window closes, and that curve is doing as much work as the copy inside it.

That is subtle to dramatic from Chapter 13, applied to a calendar instead of a paragraph. Evenly spaced sends read as a schedule somebody set up once and walked away from. Sends that tighten read like a person who keeps thinking about you and is running out of time to help. Nobody on your list will ever articulate that. All of them feel it.

One mechanic will break this run harder than any sentence you write: **suppress the buyers**. The second somebody purchases on Day 14, they have to fall out of Days 16, 17 and 18. Tag on purchase, exclude that tag from the remaining Gift sends, and test it with your own address before it goes live. A customer who paid on Monday and gets begged on Thursday to buy the thing they already own learns that nobody over there is actually reading anything, and every personal touch you built over two weeks goes in the bin with that one send.

Expect unsubscribes on Day 18. Some of them will be annoyed, and a couple will write to tell you so. That is the correct cost of a real deadline, and the list you have on Day 19 is worth more than the one you had on Day 17 because the people left are the people who want the mail.

In 2026 there are two extra knobs worth turning. Send the evening reminder in the recipient's own time zone if your platform can do it, because 8pm matters and 8pm Eastern does not help somebody in Portland. And keep one-click unsubscribe working perfectly through all five sends, because the alternative to an unsubscribe on Day 18 is a spam complaint on Day 18, and Chapter 17 explains what that costs you.

## Day 20 gives it back

Day 20: Special Report. Value, free, no offer being pushed, two days after you spent five days asking for money.

Make it the best free thing you have. Not the leftovers, not a teaser for the next gift, not the first chapter of the paid product with a buy link at the bottom. A person who did not buy should read the Day 20 email and think that passing was fine and this sender is still worth having in the inbox. A person who did buy should read it and feel smart.

**The list has to end the twenty days ahead of where it started even if it never spent a dollar.**

That is what keeps the next Gift from landing on a list that has learned your emails are just a bill arriving on a schedule. The Special Report is the reason you get a second run, a third run, and a year of runs on the same addresses.

Here is what I promised readers of the 2013 white paper, word for word:

*By taking all of the information I've provided here in the guide, and implementing it in a strategy as outlined above, I can promise you that you will see major gains in not only the effectiveness of your email program, but more importantly, your business overall.*

That is a big promise and it was written by a guy who was selling a program. I still stand by the shape of it. The tools moved a long way since 2013, the phones got better at hiding your subject line, and a lot of the mail in the box is now written by a machine that never runs out of patience. The twenty days did not move. Bait, persona, value for a week, a poll, proof, a gift with a real clock on it, then value again.

There is one thing I have not talked about in any email I just described, including the Special Report on Day 20: the button. Chapters 11 and 12 waved at it. Chapter 20 gives it its own page, and it is shorter and blunter than this one.

## **Do this Monday**

- Pull your Day 7 poll replies into a document and pick four to paste into the Day 11 email, including one complaint.
- Write the three lines of your Day 18 evening reminder before you write anything else in the run.
- Decide what comes off the price or goes into the box for the Gift, and write down what it costs you.
- Put the deadline in your calendar with a time and a time zone, then set a reminder to actually turn the link off.
- Build the purchase tag and the suppression rule, then buy your own offer with a test address to prove Days 16 to 18 stop arriving.
- Draft the Day 20 Special Report before you launch the Gift, so you cannot borrow from it when you run short on Day 16.

# Every Email Can Sell

In 2013 I wrote this sentence into the PAR Program white paper: “Here is one of the templates we use for blu, the electronic cigarette company.” Under that sentence sat a screenshot of the template, and the screenshot did not survive into this edition. What survived is the paragraph I wrote underneath it, which turned out to be the part worth keeping.

Two things about that template are in my notes and I am not going to invent a third. There was a large bold Buy Now button on the left hand side. There was a Free Shipping offer riding along with it. The email itself was a value email, the kind that tells a customer something useful and asks for nothing back.

A helpful email with a door to the store cut into the side of it.

**Bottom line:** EVERY email that you send should have the ability for readers to make a purchase. All ten emails in the Sequence, the value emails on Day 2 and Day 4, the poll on Day 7, the Special Report on Day 20, every one of them. People decide to buy while they are reading, not later, and if there is no way to act on that decision in the next two seconds, the decision evaporates. You still paid to send the email. You just did not put a door in it.

## Notice the button

Here is the 2013 paragraph, whole, since the picture it points at is gone:

*Notice how there is a nice, large and bold “Buy Now” button on the left hand side? If you don’t have a way for users to make the purchase the instant you’ve sold them on it, then why are you sending these emails?*

The word doing the work in that paragraph is **the instant you’ve sold them**. Not that day. Not on their next visit. The moment somebody reads a line about a product and thinks “yeah, actually,” a clock starts, and that clock runs out fast. A phone buzzes. A kid yells. The train stop comes up. The message underneath yours is from their boss.

This happens in your own inbox too. You read a newsletter, decide you want the thing, have no link in front of you, tell yourself you will look it up after dinner, and you never do. Not because you changed your mind. Because 40 more emails landed on top of it and you never thought about it again.

The email cost the sender the same whether or not it had a button on it. The list, the platform, the copy, the twenty days of building trust: all of that spend already happened by the time your subscriber is sitting there half sold. Leaving off the purchase link at that exact moment is the most expensive thing you can do for free.

## **A door is not a shove**

**A value email with no way to buy is a favor, and favors do not pay for the Sequence.** I am not telling you to pitch in every email. Chapter 18, The Sequence, Days 1 to 7, spends a whole week doing the opposite, and it is right to. What I am telling you is that giving value and giving a way to buy are two different decisions, and most people collapse them into one.

Here is the objection you will hear, and it usually comes from whoever owns the brand: a Buy Now button on a value email makes us look like we only want their money.

No. A button is a door. The reader walks through it or does not. It does not interrupt the copy and it does not change one word of the useful thing you came to say. It sits there being available. A store that props its front door open is not shoving anybody inside.

What actually looks greedy is an email that spends 600 words explaining why you need the thing and then makes you go find it. That reads as a sales pitch wearing a helpful hat, because the reader can feel the pitch and cannot act on it, which leaves them holding the worst half of the transaction.

Run the numbers in your head on the value email from Day 4, the one the outline in Chapter 18 calls “Value + recommendation with affiliate links.” That email is going to some number of people who already bought from you, some who were never going to, and a thin slice in the middle who have been circling the product for a week and just needed a nudge. The button is for that slice. Everybody else scrolls past a rectangle.

## **One button is not a template**

Chapter 16, Platforms and Plain Text, tells you to draft in Rich Text and paste into plain text, and says I have never once done well with an eye-appealing template. Both things are true at the same time, and the line between them is exact.

**One button, or one bold link on its own line, is not a designed template.** A designed template is a header image with a logo, a three-column grid, a hero photo, a color block behind the body copy, a footer with social icons, and a web font that does not exist on the reader's phone. That is the thing that breaks. It breaks in dark mode, it breaks when images are blocked by default, it breaks when the mail client strips your CSS, it breaks when Gmail decides your message is too long, clips it, and hides the bottom half behind a link, and it broadcasts "advertisement" from six feet away before anybody reads a word.

A Buy Now button breaks none of that. It is one element. If a mail client refuses to render it as a button, it falls back to a link that still works.

Anything built in 2013 carried more design than I would build today, and that is a 2013 habit rather than a rule. What made the blu email work was not the graphics. It was that the purchase was never more than one tap away from wherever the reader's eye happened to be.

So the 2026 version of that template is simpler than the 2013 one:

- One column. Not two, not a sidebar, because the sidebar becomes a second column stacked under your copy on a phone and nobody scrolls to the basement.
- The button above the fold, which on a phone means inside the first screen, before the reader has to move a thumb.
- The same link once more at the bottom, for the people who did read all the way down.
- A plain text version that carries the same URL on its own line, because some of your list will only ever see that version.

Two placements of one link. That is the entire design budget.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Put the button before the copy, not after it. Chapter 14, *Keep the Focus*, is built on the fact that a big chunk of your list only reads the bold bits and never reaches the bottom of anything. If your only purchase link lives under the last paragraph, you have hidden it from exactly the people who make fast decisions. Button, then copy, then the same link again at the end for the slow readers.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** Look at where the candy is in a grocery store. It is not in aisle nine with the baking supplies where candy logically belongs. It is at the register, at hand height, at the one moment you are standing still with your wallet already out. No grocery chain does that by accident, and none of them worry that it makes them look pushy. The Buy Now button is the checkout-lane candy of your email.

## Free shipping still works

The offer sitting next to the button in that blu template was Free Shipping, and my note from 2013 was blunt about it: “we’ve had a lot of success including special offers in the email. In this instance, it is ‘Free Shipping’.”

**Free shipping is the offer I would still test first for anything physical.** I do not have a percentage for you and I am not going to make one up. What I have is a pattern I have watched for years and would call a rule of thumb: a shipping charge that shows up at the last step of checkout kills more carts than a higher price on the product page does. People price a thing in their head when they first see it, then a \$7.95 line item appears at the end and it feels like a penalty rather than a cost. Free shipping removes a surprise. Most discounts are trying to add an incentive, which is harder work.

The second thing free shipping does is protect your price. If you run 40 percent off to get a first order, you have taught that buyer that your product is worth 60 percent of what you asked, and the next email at full price now reads as a bad deal by comparison. Free shipping costs you real money too, but it does not retrain anybody’s idea of what the product is worth.

For a digital product there is no shipping to give away, so the equivalent is anything that removes a surprise rather than cutting the number: a bonus that is part of the thing, a longer refund window, an extra seat, the first month at no charge on something that renews. Same shape, different lever.

## Acquire or bring them back

Here is the 2013 instruction, and it is the one I would put on the wall:

*When it comes to offers, you can experiment with various incentives, deals and coupons until you find one that attracts the most consumers initially but also has the power to bring them back for more in the future.*

Read that as two jobs, because **an offer that acquires and an offer that brings them back are rarely the same offer**. A steep first-order coupon is very good at the first job and actively bad at the second, because it selects for people who came for the coupon and will wait for the next one. A store credit applied to the next order is bad at the first job (it gives them nothing today) and good at the second. Free shipping is the one I have seen do a passable version of both, which is why it is the default rather than the winner.

The Mr. Goodcents bait from Chapter 3, The Free Sandwich, is the acquisition end of this taken to its limit: buy one sandwich, get one free, opted into online and worth nothing until the buyer walks into the store. The offer and the visit were the same act. Most of the offers you write will not be that clean, so you have to decide which of the two jobs a given offer is being asked to do before you put it in an email.

Then you run it. One offer per test, live in the Sequence for long enough that a real number comes out the other side, and you write down what happened before you change anything else. Free shipping against 10 percent off. Free shipping against a bonus item. The winner against whatever you think of next month.

Which means you need to be able to tell a real result from noise, and that is the part almost nobody does. Chapter 21, Reading the Numbers, is where that gets fixed.

## **Do this Monday**

- Open all ten emails in your Sequence and count how many contain a working purchase link. Write the number down before you fix anything.
- Add one Buy Now button above the first paragraph of every email that does not have one, and repeat the same link once at the bottom.
- Send yourself the Day 4 value email and read it on your phone with images off, checking that the button is still a tappable link on the first screen.
- Pick one offer to sit next to the button, and write in one sentence whether you are asking it to acquire buyers or bring them back.
- Delete every header image, sidebar and footer icon from the template, leaving one column and two instances of one link.
- Put a reminder six weeks out to swap that offer for a second one, so you have two numbers to compare instead of one.

# Reading the Numbers

Back in 2013 I put one line in this guide about a smaller niche newsletter of mine: over \$765,000 from less than 14,000 people. Then I moved straight on to the 3 Persuasive P's, which was lazy of me, because the interesting part of that sentence is the division. Chapter 10 did it once, rounded. Here it is with the decimals.

\$765,000 divided by 14,000 is \$54.64. Call it about \$55 a subscriber, and a little more than that, since it was fewer than fourteen thousand people. That is my own arithmetic on my own number. It is not audited, it is not monthly, and it is not a promise about your list. It is what one list of mine was worth over its life.

Fifty-five dollars a person changes every decision you make. It changes what you will pay for traffic, how hard you will work on an opt-in form, and how you feel about the day four hundred people unsubscribe.

**Bottom line:** Know what one subscriber is worth to you, then keep a seven-column dashboard for each of the ten emails in the Sequence so you can see which one broke. When the money stops, check the plumbing first, the audience second, the offer third, and the copy last, because copy is the part everybody rewrites first and it is almost never the thing that died.

## What a subscriber is worth

Do this division before you do anything else in this chapter. **Revenue per subscriber is the number that prices every other decision you make**, and almost nobody who runs a list can tell you theirs.

Two versions of it. The first is revenue per subscriber over the Sequence: take everybody who opted in during a month, add up what they bought in their first twenty days, divide by how many of them there were. The second is revenue per subscriber over a year: same people, twelve months of buying, same division.

Pretend you took in 3,000 opt-ins last year and tracked \$41,000 in sales back to that list. That is \$13.67 a subscriber for the year. Pretend \$4,100 of it landed inside the twenty-day Sequence. That is \$1.37 a subscriber in the first three weeks.

Now the two numbers do work for you. The \$1.37 is your ceiling on paid traffic if you need the money back this month. The \$13.67 is your ceiling if you can float the cost for a year. Chapter 1 was about paid traffic with no capture step being a donation to your competitors; this is the arithmetic that tells you exactly how big the donation was.

It also puts a price on the stuff that feels free. A list of 3,000 losing 400 people to a bad week is not “some churn.” At \$13.67 a head it is \$5,468 of next year walking out, and that is the number to say out loud before you send a sloppy email to the whole file.

Track the money at the link level or you will never get either figure. Every link in every email carries a tag that says which email it came from, the same slot where our 2013 emails carried an affiliate id. If your cart or affiliate report cannot tell you which of the ten emails produced a sale, you have ten emails and one blurry total.

## The dashboard per email

One spreadsheet. Ten rows, one for each email in the Sequence, and seven columns. Print it or keep it in a tab you actually open on Mondays.

**Delivered.** Sent minus bounces. Hard bounces over about 2 percent on any send means the list has junk in it and the mailbox providers are watching you, which is Chapter 17’s problem.

**Opened.** This is the softest number on your dashboard, and it has been soft since 2021, when Apple’s mail privacy changes started pre-loading images for people who use Apple Mail. A pre-loaded image is a recorded open by a machine that nobody read. Corporate security filters do the same thing. So your open rate is inflated by an amount you cannot measure, which makes it useless as an absolute and still useful as a trend against itself. If Email 3 has been reading 38 percent for six months and drops to 11 percent, something real happened, even though 38 was never true either.

**Clicked.** Unique clicks, not total clicks, because one person who clicks the same link four times is one person. This is your honest number, with one asterisk: the same scanners that fake opens also fetch links to check them, so a few clicks in the first seconds after a send are robots. Ignore anything that clicks every link in the email inside one second.

**Click-to-open.** Clicks divided by opens. It is the closest thing to a grade on the copy itself, since it asks what share of the people who got the email in front of their eyes did the thing you asked. It inherits the open number’s softness, so use it to compare your own emails to each other and never to somebody’s published benchmark.

**Unsubscribed.** Rule of thumb I use: under half a percent per email is normal, and a spike on one email means that email, not your whole program. The Day 16 “Holy Crap” email will always unsubscribe more people than Day 4, because Day 16 is asking for money. That is the cost of the Gift days and it is fine.

**Complained.** The spam button. Chapter 17 has the published thresholds (stay under 0.1 percent, 0.3 percent is the hard line), and unlike everything else on this list, treat it as a threshold instead of a metric. Cross it and your delivery to everyone degrades, including the people who love you. The big mailbox providers publish their own bulk sender numbers and they move, so go read the current ones from the provider rather than from me, and watch the trend in your own reports either way.

**Revenue.** Dollars tagged to that email. Fill in all ten rows and the Sequence stops being a story you tell and becomes a machine with parts, where you can see the row that produces nothing and go look at it.

## The failure ladder

When somebody tells me their sequence stopped converting, I ask four questions in a fixed order, and I refuse to skip ahead even when the answer feels obvious. **Check the plumbing first, because plumbing is the only part that fails silently.**

**Plumbing.** Is the automation still switched on. Did somebody redesign the opt-in form last month and break the trigger. Did the DNS records from Chapter 17 get rotated by whoever manages the domain. Is the From address still able to receive a reply. Does every link still resolve, or is Day 11 pointing at an offer page that has been a 404 since March. Is the checkout working on a phone. None of these throw an error at you. The dashboard just goes quiet and the emails keep sending into nothing.

The check takes fifteen minutes: sign up through your own live form with a brand new address at Gmail, then again at Outlook, and ride the whole Sequence like a subscriber. Do it the first Monday of every month. I have found more dead money in that fifteen minutes than in any rewrite I have ever done.

**Audience.** Same emails, different people. Did the Bait change, or did the traffic source change under you. A list built from people who came for a free sandwich coupon behaves nothing like a list built from people who came for a guide about spotting fake dating profiles, and if your traffic quietly shifted from one page to another, your Sequence is now speaking to strangers. Break revenue per subscriber out by source. When one source reads \$0.19 and another reads \$4.40, you do not have an email problem.

**Offer.** The offer went stale, or somebody else is now giving away what you sell. This is Chapter 20's territory, and my 2013 instruction still stands: experiment with various incentives, deals and coupons until you find one that attracts the most consumers initially but also has the power to bring them back for more in the future. Free shipping stopped being a differentiator in a lot of categories the moment everybody did it. Yours will have its own version of that.

**Copy.** Last. Copy is the part people rewrite first because it is the only part that is fun, and it is the part that was working fine yesterday. If the plumbing is clean, the audience is the same people, and the offer still sells on another channel, then go look at copy, and even then look only at the one row in the spreadsheet where the clicks fall off. Rewriting all ten emails because the total went down is how you destroy an asset that had one broken pipe.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** Back in my Wells Fargo years (Chapter 17), the thing that woke me up at 3 a.m. was never the server that fell over loudly. Loud is easy. It was always the process that kept running, kept writing a log, kept reporting healthy, and had quietly stopped doing the one job it existed to do. An email automation with a broken trigger is that exact animal. It looks alive on every screen you have.

## Change one thing

Here is the most useful thing I learned about testing, and I learned it by accident. Chapter 4 told the story of the three dating guides that all converted the same, and the page with no guide at all that fell off a cliff.

Having a Bait mattered enormously. Which Bait it was mattered hardly at all. **Most tweaks are noise, and the few things that are not noise are big and structural:** whether there is a Bait, whether there is a persona with a name, whether the Buy Now button exists, whether the Gift days have a deadline.

So test one thing at a time, and test things that are that size. If you change the subject line and the send time and the button in the same week, you have learned nothing about any of them, and you will spend the next month defending a conclusion you invented.

My rule of thumb on sample size: if you cannot get a few hundred people into each side of a test, you are reading tea leaves. A 3 percent difference on eighty people is a coin flip wearing a lab coat. When two versions come back close on a real sample, stop, keep the one you like writing better, and go spend that afternoon on the offer instead.

## Maintenance

An evergreen Sequence rots, because it does not know what year it is. Somebody opting in eighteen months from now reads your Day 4 email as though you wrote it this morning.

Kill the dated references. Anything that says “last week,” “this year’s,” a holiday, a price, a version number, or the name of a platform that may not exist by the time this email fires. Write Day 4 so it is true on any Tuesday in any year.

Re-check every link quarterly, by hand, by clicking them. Affiliate links expire, merchants pull offers, redirects rot, and the link in Email 7 that quietly went dead in February took the best-converting day of your Gift days with it.

Re-run the poll. The Day 7 feedback email from Chapter 9 is not only there to collect testimonials, it is there to tell you what people are bitching about now. The pain that fed the Chapter 11 email was the pain people had when you wrote it, and pain moves. Read fifty fresh answers once a quarter and you will find the new one in about twenty minutes.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** The poll is the cheapest diagnostic you own. Before you rewrite a single email, mail your last ninety days of subscribers one question: “What were you hoping this would help you with, and did it?” You will get an answer no dashboard can give you, for the price of one send, and half the time it tells you the offer is wrong rather than the words. Enough measuring. Chapter 22 is short and it is an order.

## Do this Monday

- Divide your total tracked revenue by the number of people who joined your list, once for the twenty-day Sequence and once for the year. Write both numbers on a sticky note and put it on your monitor.
- Build the ten-row spreadsheet with the seven columns: delivered, opened, clicked, click-to-open, unsubscribed, complained, revenue. Fill it from your platform’s reports for the last ninety days.
- Sign up through your own live opt-in form with a brand new Gmail address and ride all twenty days, clicking every link. Fix what you find before you touch a word of copy.
- Break revenue per subscriber out by traffic source, and stop paying for whichever source is at the bottom.
- Read your ten emails looking only for dated references, and rewrite every one of them so it is true a year from now.
- Send the one-question poll to everybody who joined in the last ninety days, and pick your next test from what comes back.

# PART VII: GO

# Take Action

In 2013 I wrote a fake email from a made-up guru to sell a guide nobody had written yet, and the most honest sentence in this whole book is sitting in the middle of it.

*Taking action is 99% of this. My guide is 1%. Anyone can follow the step-by-step no fail system I have come up with but unfortunately 99% of people are too lazy to do it. So I personally cannot take credit for it.*

I took that apart in Chapter 8, The Reluctant Hero, as a persuasion device, which is what it was. Now I am turning it around and pointing it at the person holding the book.

**Bottom line:** This book is the 1%. You have the Bait, the Persona, the 3 Persuasive P's, the twenty-day Sequence, the Gift days, the Buy Now button, the authentication records and the dashboard, and none of it does anything sitting in a PDF. The plan after Day 20 is short enough to fit in a paragraph: run a new deal every two or three days, favor the high end, research everything before you send it, and take one or two swings a year at a price point where two sales matter.

## A new deal every two or three days

Once the Special Report goes out on Day 20, **going forward every 2-3 days you continue to run a new deal**. That is the whole cadence. It was the cadence in 2013 and I have not found a reason to change it.

A deal is not a newsletter. It is an offer with a reason attached and a date it stops, the same shape as the Gift days in Chapter 19, just shorter and quieter. Subtle to dramatic in three emails instead of five. The persona who spent twenty days being useful now has standing to say “this is good, it ends Thursday” without sounding like a billboard.

What kills lists is the gap, not the frequency. People finish the Sequence, feel like they earned a rest, go quiet for six weeks, then come back swinging with a pitch. A subscriber who has not heard from Sarah since October does not remember opting in, so they hit the spam button instead of the unsubscribe link, and now you are fighting the mailbox providers with the problem from Chapter 17 that fails silently. Two or three days keeps the name in the From line familiar. Eight weeks makes it a stranger.

## Favor the high end

**Marketing products that are on the higher end is your best bet.** A \$9 ebook and a \$400 program cost you the identical amount of work: one email, one list, one send, one Buy Now button. The only thing that changes is the number on the receipt.

You can also run this system with one-time affiliate deals, although they tend to pay much less. In 2013 that is most of what we did at PAR Program, and I will be straight with you: I have zero interest in the affiliate business today and would not build a company on it now. The mechanic underneath still holds no matter where the product comes from. Your own course, a client's product, a partner's software, a sandwich coupon from a franchise with four stores. Price it high enough that a handful of yeses is worth the twenty days you spent earning them.

The low-end reflex is fear. Everybody's first instinct is to protect the list from a big number, so they go find something cheap and safe, sell forty of them, clear a few hundred dollars, and conclude email does not work. The list did not reject the price. It was never offered one.

## Research the offers

By Day 20 you have your subscribers in the palm of your hand and they love the value you are providing them. That is exactly the moment most people blow it up, because a warm list will buy the first thing you point at, including garbage.

In 2013 the move was to keep sending them Clickbank offers that gave them more of what they expected, and the marketplace is still the right idea in 2026 even if the brand on the door changes. You need a supply of products in your niche that you did not have to build. What you do not need is somebody else's sales page doing your thinking. So: **I HIGHLY recommend you research the offers so you are actually giving your list value.**

Research means four specific things, and none of them are reading the affiliate page. Buy the product with your own money. Use it for a week and write down what it actually does. Ask the vendor for the refund rate and listen carefully to how long it takes them to answer. Open the checkout on a phone and see whether it upsells the buyer three times before the download.

One bad recommendation costs more than one good one earns. The unsubscribes are the cheap part. The expensive part is that the next email from your persona gets read with a squint, and the poll answers go from "this helped me" to nothing at all.

**ShoeMoney Tip:** Write the offer email only after you have used the product yourself, and put one detail in it that could only come from using it. The tab that is hidden in the settings. The chapter that is padding. The thing that took ten minutes instead of the promised two. That single true detail does more for trust than every testimonial on the vendor's page, and you cannot fake it with any writing tool made so far.

## One or two big swings a year

You can also go for a high dollar sale. Depending on the niche there are a lot of gurus that do one to two launches a year at 2-5k price point. Getting a couple sales at this price point is huge.

Run the arithmetic yourself, because it is the plainest math in the book. At \$3,000, two buyers is \$6,000 from one week of emails to a list you already own. At \$5,000, two buyers is \$10,000. That is not a claim about your list, it is multiplication, and it is why the people doing this **do one to two launches a year** instead of one a month.

Twice a year is the ceiling for a reason. A \$3,000 offer needs everything in this book working at once: a persona with a back story, real proof from real buyers, pain the reader recognizes, and a deadline that is true. Run that four times a year and the deadline stops meaning anything, because your list has watched the cart close and reopen. Run it twice and people mark their calendar.

**ShoeMoney A.D.D. Side-note:** The extended warranties I sold at Sears at 19 (Chapter 10) taught me one thing about big numbers: the size of the number on the tag never decided anything. The offer got made or it did not. Same with a \$3,000 launch: the email goes out on Tuesday, or it sits in drafts while you read one more article about subject lines.

## Good or bad

The original 2013 edition of this guide ended by asking for questions and feedback, good or bad, at a support address. That address is gone. I sold PAR Program to GoSocial in November 2015 and the mailbox went with it, so there is nothing at the bottom of this page for you to write to.

Ask the question of your own list instead. That is the poll from Chapter 9, Engagement, sitting on Day 7 of every sequence you run, and the bad answers are the ones worth having. The good ones become the proof email. The bad ones tell you which part of the machine to go fix before you spend another dollar sending traffic at it.

## Do this Monday

- Pick the bait and write it: a coupon, a guide, a video, or free access to something.
- Build the opt-in form and put three results on it, in the reader's language, not the product's.
- Name the persona, long form, no name a stripper would use.
- Write the Day 1 double opt-in email and send it to yourself on a phone.
- Draft the three-email Sarah run for your niche: pain, potential, proof, in that order.
- Build the Day 7 poll and ask for good and bad.
- Pick the gift for Days 14 to 18 and set the deadline before you write a word of it.
- Authenticate the sending domain with SPF, DKIM and DMARC, then send a test to three different mailbox providers.
- Set up the seven-column dashboard from Chapter 21 and write down your revenue per subscriber.
- Put the first deal on the calendar for two days after the Special Report, and go.