SUBJECT

11 "MADE YOU LOOK" SECRETS

LINE

TO GET EMAILS OPENED & READ

SCIENCE

BASED ON $100+ MILLION IN SALES

DONNIE BRYANT

Subject Line Science

*11 "Made You Look" Secrets
to Get Emails Opened & Read*

By Donnie Bryant

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An Introductory Analogy

I married my wife, Adina, when I was a 19-year old college freshman.

She wasn't my high school sweetheart. Just the sweetest thing I've ever known. And when you know, you know.

In the 4 months we dated, we talked for hours. First thing in the morning, between classes, in the dining hall, on the phone after curfew. Every day.

Except Sundays.

You see, Adina's father is a pastor. She drove across Chicago every week to attend service. So it wasn't long before I started going with her.

That's when I learned something terrible about myself.

My wife and her family were very close-knit. When the conversation got going, *it was impossible for me to get a word in*. They had stories I knew nothing about… inside jokes I wasn't privy to… and all kinds of ongoing discussions that predated me.

When they tried to include me, I could rarely hold their attention for long.

Plus, I was a shy guy. It was easier to chuckle at everyone else's anecdotes than to continually try to insert myself into the conversation.

I struggled with that situation for years. It was 100% my fault. No one ignored me on purpose. I just let my introversion and new-guy status hold me back.

There's a reason I'm telling this story.

In my experience, many entrepreneurs find themselves in a similar situation with their email lists.

They're facing a crowded, noisy inbox and it's really hard to gain and maintain attention…

Just like I sat at the dinner table countless times, unsure how to wriggle my way into these conversations and have a chance to tell MY story.

Does this sound familiar?

Your subscribers have their own entire worlds that existed before they opted in to your email list.

How do you get your foot in the door, win attention and begin leading conversations with them?

Your subject lines, in large part, will determine your success or failure in this enterprise.

Actually, your job is harder than mine was. Because you're not family to most of your subscribers. It's much easier to dismiss or ignore you.

But in both cases, the first line that comes out of your mouth can make or break everything that follows.

And if you successfully take the lead of a few interesting conversations, your job gets easier and easier.

Just like great subject lines open the doors for an engaging and lucrative relationship with your email list.

You must be able to win attention to have any chance of staying alive as an entrepreneur or marketer in today's world.

I wrote *Subject Line Science* to share with you the attention-grabbing secrets about subject lines most entrepreneurs and marketers never discover.

Even many full-time copywriters never fully grasp them.

You can't blame anyone for not knowing. Unearthing these realities takes:

- thousands of tests
- mountains of data, and
- TIME to discern the difference between anomalies, trends and enduring truth.

Not to mention a maniacal obsession with the task.

Only a small percentage of the population is committed enough to go through all that.

No problem! I'm about to share many key insights I've learned after 16 years of exhaustive study… vigorous testing… and sales north of $100 million (so far).

For professional copywriters and email marketing amateurs alike, this book will reveal the science involved with writing subject lines that *seem* like magic.

You'll get easy-to-read explanations, practical ideas and specific examples.

It's also designed to be almost a desktop reference book. Anytime you need ideas or inspiration, or a fill-in-the-blank template to go with today's email, crack open *Subject Line Science* and sample the smorgasbord.

This is going to be fun!

Foundations

Foundation #1: They Don't Really Care About Us

Before we get to the main focus of this book, there are some important preliminary concepts we need to establish.

This is foundational. Even the best subject lines ever written are part of a larger ecosystem. Each part affects the next.

You need to remember that our readers are not interested in you (with one caveat I'll explain later).

Even though they subscribed to your email list to hear from you… even though they may have spent significant amounts of money with you… most of the people on your list do not care about you.

Maybe I should say *they don't care about your emails.*

And why should they? They already have more than enough going on in their lives. Overstuffed calendars full of work deadlines, relationships that need to be maintained, doctor's appointments, you name it.

And really, this is your open door of opportunity.

The number 1 way to write emails (and run a business) in a way that all but guarantees success is to get very familiar with the specific

- Pains and problems…
- Fears and frustrations…
- Dreams and desires…

… that fill your ideal client's waking hours. Because when you know what topics he already cares about and spends time thinking about, you've found a great shortcut to a place of priority in his jam-packed schedule.

That's probably why he signed up for your email list in the first place.

Keep this in mind when writing subject lines and the rest of your emails, too. It's not about the stories you want to tell, but the situation(s) he wants to improve.

Foundation #2: Integrity

I wish I didn't have to say this, but I know from experience that it needs to be said:

I'm not encouraging you, nor will I ever encourage you, to be dishonest with your readers.

Some of the things you read in this book may push you outside your customary ways of thinking and communicating. It may sound like I'm calling for clickbaity hyperbole and chucking integrity out the window.

That's not the case.

I *will* encourage you to be much bolder and often less direct or straightforward with your subject lines. The purpose is not to mislead anyone. It's coming to grips with the fact that it's harder than ever to win attention, and the common straightforward approach doesn't work as well as it used to.

Every email you send must honestly satisfy the emotions and curiosity stirred by whatever "extreme" subject line you use.

Too many people make the truth sound boring. We're going to do the opposite.

Foundation #3: Who, Not What

The "from line" is more important than your subject line.

The most impactful way to get people to open your emails consistently and take action (aka buy from you) is to be known as a sender who sends valuable, enjoyable content and offers.

This sounds like a direct contradiction to Foundation #1. But it's not.

Here's the thing: the only reason someone opens an email is because he believes there's something he wants or needs inside. Great subject lines are a hint that the email will be interesting and valuable to him specifically.

But there comes a point when a subscriber puts you in 1 of 2 categories:

1. He's confident he'll get value when he opens your email
2. He doubts he'll get any relevant value if he opens

Once you're in the first category, he'll open a higher percentage of your emails, regardless of the subject line.

Your subscriber DOES care about you… because he believes you're going to help him get more of what he wants and/or less of what he doesn't want.

(This is also crucial for deliverability – the likelihood your emails land in the inbox instead of the spam folder or fail to be delivered at all.)

If you fall into the second category, it's going to take a darn good subject line to convince him to take a chance and open your email.

You've probably landed in one category or the other in the first 7 days after someone opts in. That's why a good autoresponder sequence is essential.

Too many organizations sabotage their own success in that first week.

This book isn't about autoresponders, but I think it's worth mentioning because your first few subject lines set the stage for the entire relationship you have with a subscriber afterwards.

As a side note, it also makes sense to test the actual from line you want to settle on. It can make a marked difference in response.

For example, your name versus the company name. Or your name versus your name plus job title. Or your name vs. your nickname. Or some combination of these.

Using your first name only is usually a bad idea. Unless you're Oprah. Your subscribers may not know who you are, and it just looks strange. Even an email from your best friend usually has first and last name in the from line.

There are some email teachers who advocate for using cute from lines, like "Your Wallet" or something similar. Those certainly can garner attention and increase open rates (but not always). It generates curiosity, to be sure.

I recommend that you don't use this tactic often, for the simple reason that people do not know who you are. Any goodwill, trust and authority you've built over time is forfeited in hopes that the cleverness will get more opens without decreasing the quality of those opens.

It's a great way to shake things up. It's not a safe bet long term.

Same goes for benefits as from lines. You may see "Free Shipping" or something like that. In many cases that will outperform in terms of opens and in total sales. But it's not a sustainable strategy.

The surest way to secure long-term, quality engagement is to establish your name (in whatever variation works best) as a sender your readers look forward to getting emails from.

Foundation #4: The Way In

The way you bring someone onto your list has a massive impact on how they respond to your messages.

You'll likely find different levels of engagement from subscribers based on where they came from (acquisition source), the copy or content that convinced them to sign up, and the lead magnet (if any) they opted in to receive.

For example, if John gave you his email address to enter a drawing for a free BMW… he may not respond to future emails from you. Unless they're a notification about winning a new car.

On the other hand, a customer who just bought your course is likely to engage with your future messages at a much higher rate.

Seems obvious, but once you start to dig into your data, you'll likely find that different list-building strategies produce notably different levels of engagement.

Foundation #5: Subject Lines Have 3 Jobs (Not 1)

Most discussions about subject lines, naturally, revolve around getting opens. That's the main event. But it's not the whole show.

Before the recipient can open an email, it has to get noticed. Catch the scanning eye mid-scroll.

In that arena, nothing compares with a solid from line. In other words, becoming one of the (probably) few senders your subscriber actually looks forward to getting emails from.

Consistently sending relevant, valuable content and offers. Being entertaining – [there are 13 ways to do that, which you can learn more about here](#) – and enjoyable. Demonstrating shared values. Stuff like that.

Notwithstanding that, your subject line can stand out in the inbox with:

Scroll-stopping words – these vary depending on your industry and who your subscribers are. Seasonality may matter, too.

Ideally, they're instantly recognizable words or names with emotions (positive or negative) associated.

Adjectives: Rapid, extreme, new.
Nouns: Virus, taxes, romance.
Active Verbs: Squeeze, catapult, disturb.
Names: Jordan, Beyoncé, Apple.

Numbers work well, too. Especially really specific ones.

If we wrote these words on slips of paper and put them in a bowl, you may randomly pull out a subject line like *"3 new taxes squeeze Apple investors."* Not too shabby.

Relevance/Affinity – A subject line that consistently generates high engagement for me is "Since you didn't watch the video."
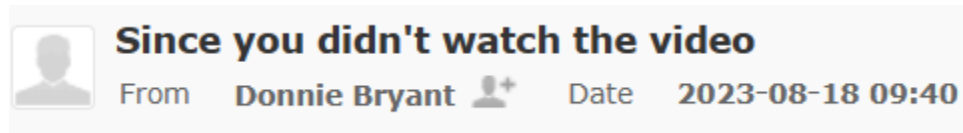
This may not seem like thrilling copy. There's nothing clever or urgent. No value or overt persuasion.

But it's extremely relevant. It's clear to the recipient it's for him.

He received an email the day before enticing him to click to watch a video. But since he didn't click, he's getting this email. The high degree of relevance (and a little bit of guilt) make this subject line hard to ignore.

That email performs spectacularly every time I use it.

A subject line that feels like it's specifically meant for you will catch your eye and opening it feels natural.

For example, what stands out in a sea of subject lines? The one that highlights the town you live in. (Certain ESPs give you this kind of dynamic content. Otherwise you may be able to segment your list by geography.)
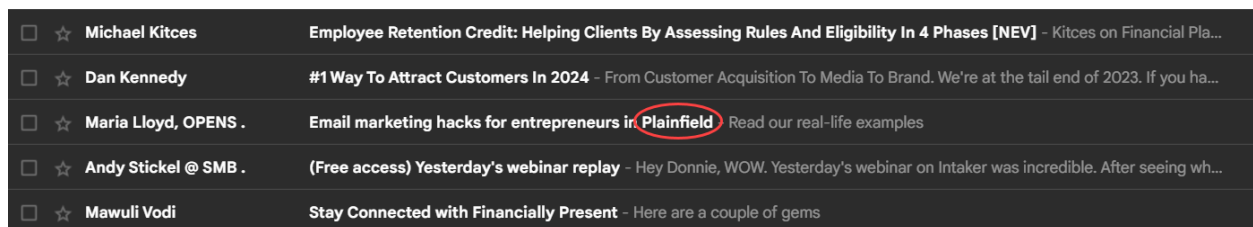
Same thing if it feels like it's specifically for a group you're a member of.

Length extremities – A short subject line like "hi" will stand out in the inbox. It's just visually distinct from every other subject line in view.

Extra long subject lines can be eye-grabbing, too. On desktop, they take up so much space, you can't miss them. Test to see how they work for you.
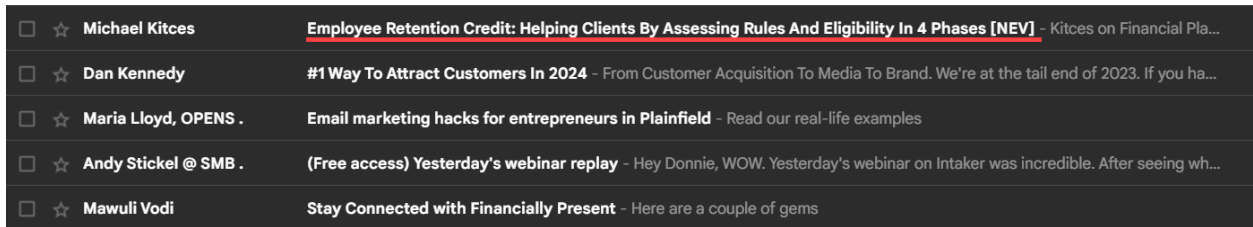
On mobile phones, they're usually cut off around 35 characters in vertical orientation. You can plan for a cliffhanger right at that point so the reader is curious to see the full subject line.
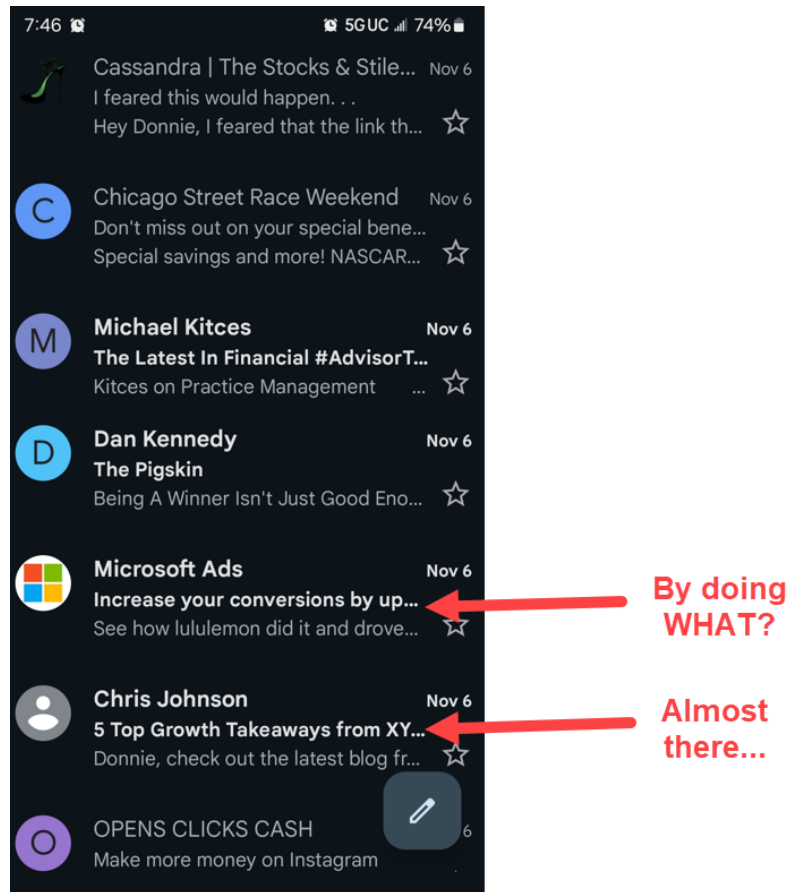
Emojis – Honestly, I haven't done much testing with emojis in the past several years.

And I haven't seen much data over the past year or two demonstrating that emojis make a significant difference in open rates, click rates or spam complaints (higher or lower).

That said, an emoji can be an attention-getter. Which could be good or bad.

It's definitely worth testing for yourself. Make sure any emoji you try aligns with your brand and fits your industry. And don't go overboard with 10 of them in one subject line.

After getting noticed in the inbox, the subject line's second job is to be valuable enough (and value comes in countless forms) to convince the reader to open the email.

The third job is one you really don't hear people talk about.

A good subject line should appeal to people in the right mental and emotional state to open, read with enthusiasm and take action – or put readers in that state.

This concept is easier to explain than to apply.

If you've been testing different kinds of subject lines and paying attention to the metrics, you may have noticed that *the subject line with the higher open rate sometimes has a lower clickthrough rate.*

Why?

Because different subject lines may attract different people, and people in different moods at the time. And they can affect your mood when you see them and decide to check out the email.

Naturally, the unique combinations of curiosity, desire and emotion in the subject line impact how many people click the link inside.

Here's where it gets wonky.

You'd think that the people (a majority, at least) who click are all in pretty much the same mental space.

They've read the same body copy inside the email and based their decision to click on that.

Meaning the conversion rate on the page linked to should be relatively consistent between both subject lines.

But when you track the metrics, you see that's often not the case.

I've seen the click-to-conversion rate (i.e. the percentage of people who buy divided by the total number of people who clicked the link in the email) on an order form differ by as much as 200% between test versions.

This is real data from an A/B split test in 2023:

	Opens	Open Rate	Clicks	Click-to-Open	Orders	Conversion
These Marijuana Stocks Have Tremendous Upside	119,139	43.21%	1,878	1.58%	10	0.53%
Final Day: We're at the Brink	117,797	42.71%	1,276	1.08%	20	1.57%

A version has 1.1% more opens

A version has 46% more clicks per open

B version as 2X more sales & 196% higher conversion rate

Same send time. Same email body copy. Same sales page. The only difference was the subject line.

The A version has a bigger promise – and it highlights a specific opportunity the subscriber believes could be very profitable. Those who open are curious about which specific stocks are about to climb.

The answer is not in the body copy or on the sales page. You'd have to buy the product to find out.

The B version is ambiguous. There's a fast-approaching deadline… but that's all we know from the subject line. Those who open want to know what they're about to miss out on.

Again, the email body copy and sales page are identical for both emails. Both highlight the specific opportunity and the urgent deadline.

But the more urgent ambiguous subject line made twice as much money with fewer opens and a whole lot fewer clicks.

The tricky part is that you don't always know which factor will prevail.

What does this mean in practical terms?

First, simply knowing that subject lines impact the deeper metrics, all the way through conversion on an order form will help you get more value from your testing.

Second, think about what mental and emotional state is optimal for converting your readers.

Then test! Pay attention to what your list responds to. Not just what emails they open… but what kind of appeals lead to conversions.

You'll get to know your subscribers in a more profound way than you may have thought possible.

Foundation #6: Frequency

Finally, the "how often should I email my list?" question.

There's a lot that goes into that decision: your industry, the kind of offers you're making, the format of your message, your time and ability, etc.

As a general rule, *I encourage you to send emails as frequently as you can write high quality emails.*

More emails = more money. I'm pretty sure it's in the Constitution.

And believe it or not, *people unsubscribe at a higher rate when you email less frequently* versus more frequently.

Weekly or even daily sends doesn't make you a spammer.

It's the people who send one email a month (or less) that seem like strangers sending random messages. After that long, subscribers may not remember who you are, let alone why they wanted to be on your list.

According to the data I've seen, weekly emails and daily emails have almost the exact same unsubscribe rate.

Unsubscribes go up when you wait more than 7 days between messages.

Here's the analogy I use. Steve Harvey is on broadcast TV at least once a day – and he's on the radio. People tune in to watch and/or listen every day. No one says "I wish Steve Harvey would stop being on Family Feud every day."

You want to figure out how to be Steve Harvey to your people.
– – –

That's it for preliminary information. By reading up to this point, you're already equipped to be a more effective, more profitable email marketer.

We'll get to the main course – writing impossible-to-ignore subject lines – after we cover one more overarching principle.

Curiosity.

Foundation # 7: Curiosity, The Master Key to Compelling Subject Lines

I almost titled this book *Scientific Subject Lines*, an allusion to Claude Hopkins' classic copywriting book, *Scientific Advertising.* (I'll tell you why I didn't in a minute.) Which is still a great read today, a full century after it was first published.

In my opinion, the most important sentence in *Scientific Advertising* appears in Chapter 6.

Explaining the psychology at work in winning advertising messages, Hopkins writes that **"curiosity is one of the strongest human incentives. We employ it whenever we can."**

Which brings us back to something we said in the introduction: people open emails because they're confident they'll be rewarded for doing so.

But humans are funny.

You can't always come right out and say what's inside. It doesn't always work.

Back to Chapter 6 of *Scientific Advertising*. To illustrate how he used curiosity in his day, Hopkins mentions "Foods shot from guns" – an unexpected way to advertise Puffed Rice cereal.

He could have talked about rice and its nutritional value. Those are **features** – and that's the sort of thing other advertisers were doing (and still do today).

He could have led with the **benefits** of feeling satisfied and energized to tackle the day's tasks.

Instead, the winning headlines included guns and steam explosions. Curiosity performed better.

They Are Really Shot from Guns

These Airy Bubbles of Wheat and Rice

Some can hardly believe that Puffed Wheat and Puffed Rice—dainty, fragile, thin-walled bubbles—have been shot from guns.
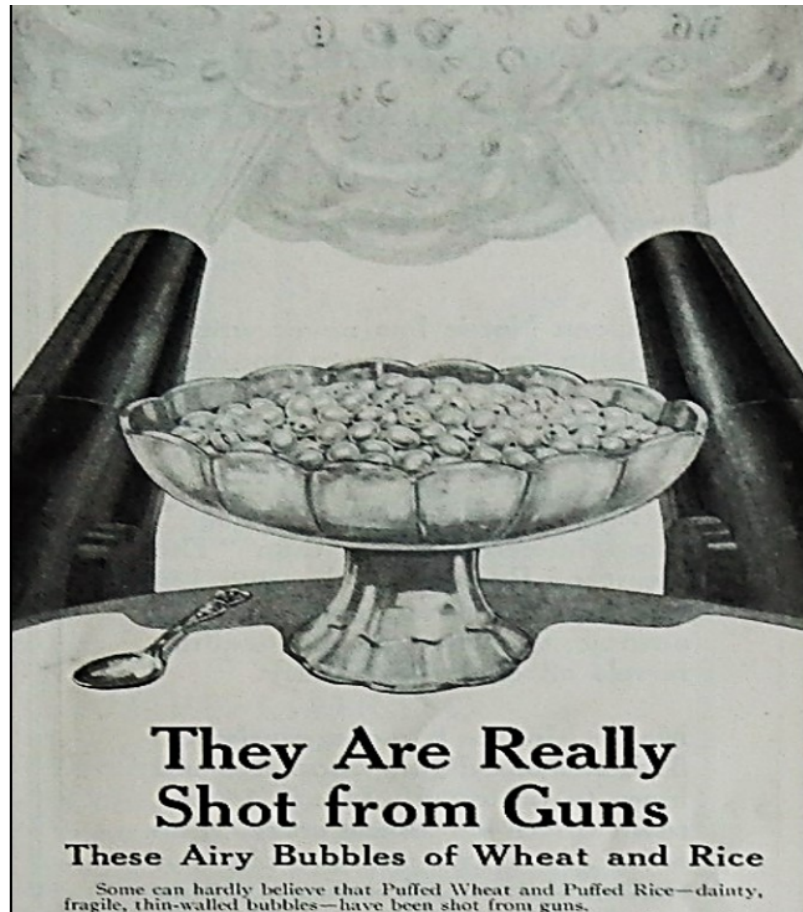
Curiosity is equally important and effective today… because human psychology isn't much different than it was in 1923.

Strike that.

Curiosity is MORE important now because it's easier than ever before to scroll away and pay attention to something more interesting.

And because your audience has been exposed to so much more than the average consumer in the 1920s.

If you've ever written a benefit-driven subject line, headline or article title and wondered why it didn't resonate as much as it "should have"…

Or if you've ever seen a "3 ways to make a million dollars in 3 minutes a day" subject line, headline or article title and instantly thought "I know what all 3 of his points are – I don't need to read this"?

Or if you've ever seen a clickbait headline you're 99% certain is nonsense… but you can't help clicking to find out for sure…

Then you can clearly see how curiosity works.

(For the record, it's only clickbait if you don't address the promise or implication made in the headline or subject line.)

You have to have a moderate amount of information or knowledge about something. If you don't know enough, you won't be interested or engaged. Know too much and there's no emotional incentive to move forward.

Below is a chart from a clinical study showing exactly that.
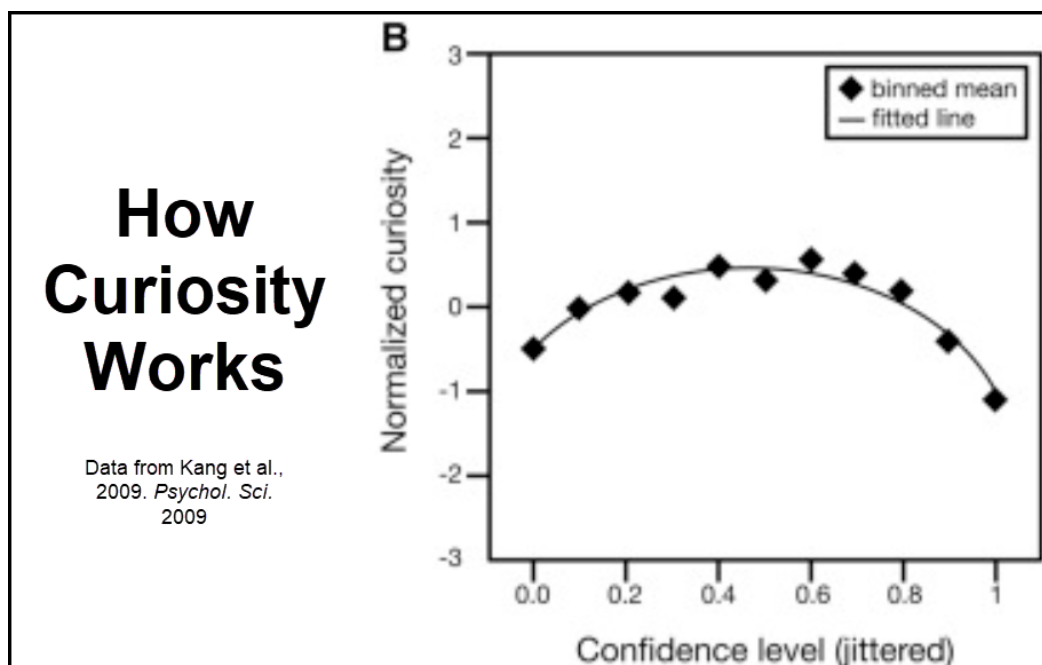
Another study determined that *curiosity is similar to physical hunger*, as they use the same neural pathways in the brain.

And an experiment by psychologist Kou Murayama, PhD showed that some **people are willing to risk electric shock to satisfy curiosity.**

The science is clear: curiosity is a strong motivator.

In fact, my data indicates that email opens are driven by curiosity more than any other factor.

This is where the world's best email marketers and copywriters shine. Most entrepreneurs could stand to improve in this area.

No shame in that! We all have countless things to manage and master in our lives. Curiosity-soaked subject lines may not be one of them for you.

This book is going to help you with that. Nine of the 11 "made you look" secrets we're about to dive into are powered by curiosity to some extent. I'm excited to share this with you!

Now, let me close the open loop we started the chapter with. I mentioned that I almost chose the Hopkins-inspired *Scientific Subject Lines* as the title of this book.

The reason I didn't is because I don't want anyone to think the subject lines we're talking about are science-related.

The word "Science" is still appropriate, I think.

Millions of pieces of data have been calculated and analyzed in the making of this book. And the book is also delving into the (inexact) science of psychology as it relates to email marketing.

Plus, *Subject Line Science* sounds righteous, doesn't it?

The Human Attention Algorithm

There's so much talk these days about the algorithms of social media, search engines, streaming platforms and, of course, generative AI tools.

There's code that determines what happens in every conceivable scenario, personalized to each individual user.

Our brains work in a similarly systematic way.

The Human Attention Algorithm is a term I started using to describe how our minds decide what to focus on and how to prioritize the multiple stimuli that regularly bombard the senses.

Side note: AI tools like ChatGPT are not designed to understand attention or write copy optimized for attention in the real world.

They're large *language* models, designed to string together words and sentences following the path of least resistance/highest probability. They're not *attention*, *persuasion* or *curiosity* models understanding how to trigger a response.

As of this writing, you still need the human touch to accomplish this.

Of course, with good prompting, you can give the AI context that can help produce copy more aligned with what's likely to work best based on your specific audience. We'll talk more about that later in the book.

3 Things You Need to Know about The Human Attention Algorithm

Factor #1: Relevance + Clarity = Victory

The brain is always paying attention to *something*. But attention is a limited and expensive resource. It's impossible to attend to everything. So the brain filters out a majority of the information your senses have access to.

That includes your ads, emails and marketing pieces. Everyone else's marketing, too.

The brain conserves its energy by ignoring the unimportant or uninteresting.

An effective way to make any message feel important and interesting is to clearly address it to a specific someone.

Call your reader out. Make it obvious that your message is for him. Identify meaningful characteristics and use them to win attention:

- Name
- Location
- Profession
- Religion
- Organizational membership
- Recent Activity (like the "Since you didn't watch the video" example we discussed earlier)

Factor #2: Attention Is (Largely) Internally Motivated & Directed

Winning attention is all about leveraging the specific triggers likely to work for your ideal client. You have to "pick the right bait."

It's true that anything unexpected, like a fire truck's horn blast or a spider crawling on your neck, is likely to gain anyone's attention.

But "unexpected" means something different for everyone.

That's why it's critical to understand the people you want to help as deeply as possible.

There are an infinite number of individual attention triggers. I put them all into 3 broad categories. Here they are, listed from weakest to strongest:

Requirements – When you know you need to pay attention to something, you pay attention. Or at least try to. For example, trying to stay tuned into a lecture from your boringest teacher the day before a big test.

Psychology (wants & likes) – Our attention is automatically drawn to things that we desire, enjoy and/or spend a lot of time engaged in. Like smelling a few molecules of the aroma of your favorite food. You're instantly on alert.

The opposite can also be true. Things you seriously dislike and want to avoid can also trigger attention. You may discover you've even come up with an escape plan without consciously thinking about it.

Biology – We can't help but pay attention to our instinctive reactions. Biological triggers include fear or the threat of danger (physical, social, relational, financial), hunger and surprise, which is related to fear.

In most cases, you can't control the physical environment of your readers.

Words representing these triggers can produce similar responses in the brain, though.

It's true that some of these triggers, like fear or hunger, can be more negative than positive.

Many entrepreneurs and marketers don't like to delve into the darker side of the mind. They're probably leaving money on the table, and they're not helping as many people as they could.

Negativity is significantly more likely to gain attention and produce strong emotions than positivity. (This has been proven in clinical studies, as well.)

You don't want to keep your messages negative for long, though.

It can demoralize and depress the reader, which decreases the likelihood that he takes action.

Use the negatives to win attention. Shift to positives to generate action.

Factor #3: Winning attention up front doesn't guarantee sustained attention over time.

Ideally, after you gain attention from the person you want to help, you'll be able to maintain his rapt attention all the way until you make your offer and answer any questions.

Here are some devices that can hold attention over time:

- Story
- Mystery or incongruity
- Problem needing solving
- Sustained fear or anxiety
- Topical interest
- Relationship and trust

That's the Human Attention Algorithm.

Now let's talk about putting all these concepts into practice.

The 11
"Made You Look"
Secrets

"Made You Look" Subject Line Type 1
Intrigue: Pure, Uncut Curiosity

We've talked about curiosity quite a bit up to this point. Now let's get a little more concrete.

I've never seen a clearer illustration of the superiority of curiosity-based subject lines over benefit-based ones than this:

Subect Line	Open Rate
The Anatomy of an Irresistible Offer	14.1%
A tour of the mansion	34.1%

An A/B split test between "The Anatomy of an Irresistible Offer" and "A tour of the mansion."

If you're on my email list, you may remember this one.

My subscribers are interested in making money through copywriting, marketing and entrepreneurship. There's really no other reason anyone would sign up to hear from me.

One would think that this particular audience would be interested in creating irresistible offers. (Maybe they're less interested in anatomy.)

Why, then, does "A tour of the mansion" – which in no way indicates that you'll learn how to get your own mansion by reading – attract more than double the eyeballs from the same audience?

You know the answer.

Curiosity cooks the competition in a huge percentage of instances.

Note: Sparking curiosity has gotten trickier in recent times. Readers across every demographic and industry have been exposed to an avalanche of information… and an ever increasing number of marketing messages.

And everyone has built up a tolerance for copywriting and marketing gimmicks. So what worked well in the past may not work as well now.

We're all going to have to work harder to pique the curiosity of our target audiences today.

Now…

As mentioned previously, 9 of the 11 "made you look" subject line categories we're going to talk about leverage curiosity to some extent. In this chapter we're going to talk about *pure curiosity plays.*

By that I mean subject lines that really don't have much information at all. Its entire goal is to make you ask "what the heck is this about???"

There HAS to be something missing from the subject line to crank up the curiosity. As you recall, too much information decreases curiosity.

There are probably a dozen ingredients that make for eye-grabbing curiosity subject lines. We'll talk about 5 of them here.

Contradictions create tension in the mind. When something doesn't make sense, you naturally want to try to figure out what's going on with that.

The good thing about a contradiction subject line is that the reader believes the only way to relieve that tension is to open the email and read.

The catch is that the contradiction must involve topics or people relevant to the reader.

A favorite example is **"3 Things Better Than Being 'the Best' in 2024."**

What could be better than being "the best"? Are you saying I shouldn't write down being "the best" in my field as my New Year's resolution?

"If this makes you money, you're doing it wrong" is a great curiosity play when sent to a business, marketing or investing related list. Seems like the opposite of what you're supposed to be talking about!

Contradictions like this make you go "hmmmmm." Which is good.

Controversy sticks out like the proverbial sore thumb – which is exactly what you want to do in the inbox.

Delete-first-ask-questions-never is the mood of the day. Swiping emails into oblivion is the easiest thing to do. The subject line's job is to make your subscribers stop long enough to at least consider reading more.

As with anything else, what rates as controversial varies by audience.

For example, most people couldn't care less about a Microsoft Excel vs. Google Docs debate. But there's a segment of the population that's going to open that email and read every word before lifting their head off the pillow in the morning.

Make a list of the big names, the unquestioned rules, the "obvious" best practices in your industry. *Question them.* Turn them upside down and tell people about the hairy underbelly.

Examples:
"The scary TRUTH about elderberry"
"Grant Cardone is an idiot."
"Use Your Life Insurance Before You Die"

When you're talking to the right people, these subject lines are tough to scroll past.

"The truth about [person/topic of interest]" is likely to work for any audience.

Another kind of contradiction is saying something that seems out of character for you. Like a subject line I wrote for a real estate influencer: "Real estate is NOT the best investment right now."

It's worth noting that the body of the email must address any promise or implication made in the subject line. Otherwise you erode the trust you're trying to build… and sabotage your future success.

Remember, the strategy that works best to get people to open your emails and buy from you is to prove you're a sender who provides valuable, enjoyable content and offers.

Outrageous statements must be used carefully. You don't want to condition your subscribers to assume you're exaggerating every time you email them.

But if you can continually *find* true stories that are out-of-this-world (and they're out there) or *create* them in your own life and business, then basically anything's fair game.

Tabloids are never short of subscribers. Keep that in mind.

Either way when you roll these out, they catch the eye like a magnet.

Examples:

"Bill Gates Wants to Nuke the World"
"Correction: Donnie is NEVER wrong"
"A flux capacitor for your trades"

How to Use Sex, Drugs & Gambling to Be a Better Investor
Crowdability ✔ (September 7, 2021 10:00 AM)

Unexpected twists on familiar subjects can be really great, too.

"The 2nd most important thing I can tell you today" is a fascinating example. The expected approach is to talk about the *most* important thing.

Curiosity comes in because the reader can't help but wonder why you skipped right to the second thing. Open loop right off the bat. What's the first most important thing? Why are you telling me the second instead?

A variation on that theme is "The (almost) perfect options strategy."

In a weird way, this approach decreases sales resistance and skepticism. It's clear you're not pulling out all the stops to be convincing. You're willing to admit imperfection. The reader may let down his guard in response.

But those are unexpected twists on the usual approach, not a familiar topic.

Some examples of this are:

"The Power of Belief… to Cripple"
"It's not mind control, technically"
"Thank God for Russian hackers" (which could have just as easily gone under the controversy heading)

The nosy neighbor effect is exactly what it sounds like. Most people can't help feeling curious about other people's experiences: their ups, downs and the wild zigzags in between.

The weirder, darker and more extreme, the better (to a certain extent, dependent on your audience).

When someone smiles, you barely notice. But it's hard not to stare when you see someone crying.

Of course, if someone was jumping for joy in the streets, you'd probably stare for a while, too.

It's part of what makes us humans.

You might assume subject lines like these wouldn't work B2B, but they do. For 2 reasons. The people reading these emails have emotions and curiosity just like everyone else. And you can make the subject lines about other businesses or organizations instead of individuals.

Examples:

"Newest Apple Product Doomed to Fail"
"Are you scared like I am?"
"Cooking video gone wrong"

Donnie moved into a halfway house Inbox ×

Donnie donnie@emailcopyboss.com via mlsend.com
to me ▾

In November 2015, I (Donnie) moved into a halfway house.

Time and again, friends and colleagues would ask me, "How did you end up THERE??"

Believe me, I didn't see it coming...

Here's the rest of the story.

- Vulnerable Donnie

"Made You Look" Subject Line Type 2
Story-Based

How many words does it take to tell a story? In some contexts, one word may tell you everything you need to know.

Stories are a great way to stand out in your subscribers' inboxes

Most of the subject lines you see are straight benefit-driven (which is cool but can get old fast if that's all you send) or announcement-style subject lines, which are the easiest subject lines to ignore. Because the reader may not see what's in it for him.

Stories are a powerful, natural tool you can use to spark intense curiosity...

So your subscribers rush to open and read. You put them in the right place to take action on your emails.

But when it comes to subject lines, don't try to tell the whole story. Just hint at the unfolding drama inside. Your subscriber then has to open it to find out what's going on.

Once his brain starts to see the story play out in his mind, it may be harder to keep scrolling than to stop and read.

I've talked a lot about story-based emails on my YouTube channel. If you're interested in hearing more, the [Boss Level Storytelling playlist](#) is for you.

Examples:
"Another Pawnshop Christmas"
"My Stunt Didn't Make It to Guinness' Book of Records"
"I always listen to my clients, but…" (note: ellipses may trigger spam filters)
"The Monster I Created"

"Made You Look" Subject Line Type 3
Selling Simplicity

One thing EVERYONE wants more of in their lives is simplicity.

A big reason your subscribers signed up for your email list is because they believed you could eliminate complexity or difficulty in some part of their lives.

Adding simplicity to your readers' lives is one way to virtually guarantee your messages consistently get attention and motivate action.

In many cases, a simpler life/business/relationship is the thing you're really selling.

Put simplicity and ease on full display in your subject lines.

Examples:

"The 'more sex' shortcut for horny husbands"
"Almost anyone can 'cash in' on real estate now"
"Nearly Triple Your Profits… Automatically"

You can clearly see how these subject lines promise an easier way for readers to get what they want in specific areas of their lives.

"Made You Look" Subject Line Type 4
Insecurity: The Tootsie Roll Center

The #1 reason people search for your product online…

Click on your ads, sign up for your email list, and ultimately BUY from you is because there's...

1) something they want and don't have

OR

2) something they have and don't want.

This causes dissatisfaction and insecurity. No one wants to feel that way. They're motivated to do *something* to alleviate the discomfort.

It sounds negative, but it's true. Insecurity is a core driver beneath many of our decisions.

That's why I call insecurity the **"Tootsie Roll center" of effective copy.** I hope that's not trademark infringement.

Now, I'm not advising you to belittle your subscribers or try to make them feel bad about themselves. The idea is to call to mind those areas where they feel they don't quite measure up… then offer them a way to fix the shortcoming.

When you tap into that feeling, you can help your subscribers get more of what they want and get rid of the stuff they don't want.

Examples:

"Is THIS the missing piece of your marriage?"
"This is why your cold emails get ignored"
"Joint pain made me feel like an old man"
"Why do I have to keep starting over???"

Notice that the subject lines aren't about marriage, cold emails or joint pain. They're about being stuck and not knowing how to get unstuck. Which is where you come in.

Again, this isn't about making your readers feel bad.

The subject lines (and the emails attached to them) pique their interest in alleviating that insecurity that's been bugging them.

The point is to help them make their situation better... by hiring or buying from you.

"Made You Look" Subject Line Type 5
Big, Unique Benefit

When most entrepreneurs think of exciting subject lines, this is the type that generally comes to mind.

Big promises delivering an outcome you know your subscribers want.

And there is definitely a place for these. Because ultimately, your readers are usually after some specific transformation – and they're on your email list because they hope you can help them with it.

Just don't let these be the only subject lines you send out!

Here are a few points to keep in mind:

1) **Make the benefit unique.** If possible, you want to say something none of your competitors or peers can say.

The truth is, you're probably not the first person your subscribers have heard talk about your topic. Having a unique mechanism is helpful. At the very least, you want to talk about your benefit in a way that's distinctly different than what your subscribers have seen before.

2) **Be bold.** If you're going to make a claim, make it a big one. Timid claims won't do you much good.

For example, if you're a CPA, your subject line should NOT be "Want to save a little on taxes?" unless you're trying to be funny.

This isn't the time to "underpromise and overdeliver." (Actually, that advice is dangerous and dumb 99% of the time.)

On the other hand, over-the-top subject lines will rarely hurt you as long as you're telling the truth and you give the reader content in the body of the email (or on the page your email links to).

3) **Vary the wording you use to describe your big benefit or outcome.**

I've just made your life a little more difficult. Because it's one thing to use different subject lines than your competitors.

Coming up with multiple variations is quite another.

Variations are useful because you can test to see what resonates with your audience best. Different presentations maximize your opportunities for curiosity.

If a reader thinks he's seen this email before, or he thinks he knows what you're going to say inside, he may think he doesn't need to open the email.

Varying the subject line appeals and phrasing can prevent subscribers from scrolling if they saw your first email earlier in the week.

When you find angles that work particularly well, double down on them. But keep testing!

Also, different variations may appeal to different people on your list. You don't want to leave them out.

Examples:

"My 17K paycheck took less than 9 minutes"
"The Myrtle Urkel Method makes swiping left IMPOSSIBLE"
"Unlock monk-like focus (in 3 steps)"
"Chocolate Sauce & Weight Loss in Feb."

"Made You Look" Subject Line Type 6
Newsy News

Almost everyone is drawn to big, breaking news stories that are relevant to them or are likely to be discussed by their peers.

So one of the easiest ways to get subscribers to drop everything and read your email is to write about a trending topic they're already interested in.

Your subscribers want to hear your perspective, opinions and expertise on topics that matter to them. That's why they're on your list. Breaking news is your chance to help them understand the world as it's happening in real-time.

There's a distinction between "news" and ordinary updates or opinions. Ideally, you'd like the subject line to look like something you might see in a local newspaper or a national network… a trade journal… or TMZ (because gossip is news, too).

Being a source of relevant news and unique perspective can increase readership, maintain it over time and neutralize readers' sales resistance.

But keep in mind: the news HAS TO BE INTERESTING, as defined by the reader.

Examples:

"The REAL reason Sam Altman got canned"
"Breaking: VC reveals Elon's AI moonshot"
"New Study Discovers Key to Living 100+ Years"

Netflix, AMC Brace for Omicron Impact (Entertainment Stock Showdown)

Money & Markets ✔ (December 2, 2021 7:50 AM)

"Made You Look" Subject Line Type 7
Urgency

Everyone knows about traditional urgency emails. I'd argue that most entrepreneurs don't use them enough, but they are aware of them.

They include deadlines, limited quantities and disappearing bonuses. These are powerful… and they work

There are two more types of urgency, and even fewer entrepreneurs use these.

The *opportunity window* and the *deterioration timebomb*, which are two sides of the same coin. Both give you the ability to use urgency even when you don't have a limited quantity or a deadline.

The opportunity window beckons for quick action because if you take action quickly, you'll position yourself for outsized benefit.

The clearest example of this is investing. Waiting even one day to buy Bitcoin could have cost you a mindblowing amount of profit.

The deterioration timebomb is your reminder that a little problem can become a catastrophe if you don't fix it ASAP. A little pain in your left arm might be more than a muscle strain…

Examples:

"Today Only: Free Shipping on Orders $20 or More"
"8 Stocks Set for a Holiday Rocket Ride"
"Simple resume tweak doubles your hireability (Fix this now)"

"Made You Look" Subject Line Type 8
Fear

I get a lot of pushback on the fear angle. Many entrepreneurs and marketers don't want to use it. I understand their hesitation. It may seem negative, manipulative or just plain wrong.

Here's the question I ask:

If you believe your product or service can help someone, isn't it worth using every possible copy device (short of dishonesty) to move him into action?

Truth is, *there really are some legitimately scary things out there.* You're in a position to warn people AND protect them. But you have to be willing to talk about frightening topics.

As you recall, fear is the highest-ranking component of the Human Attention Algorithm.

Fear gets attention like nothing else in this world. Because when all the chips are down, self-preservation (which includes your own safety and the safety of everything that matters to you) is job number one.

When going this route, **the scary thing has to be imminent and severe.**

- Far-off scary stuff isn't that scary. Talking to teens about running out of cash in retirement won't bear much fruit.
- The strength of the fear must outweigh the inconvenience of taking action. Focus on potential disasters, not minor irritations.

Again, you have to have a deep familiarity with your subscribers to know what their specific fears are.

Examples:

"Checking your portfolio is killing you"
"4 Signs Your Husband Is Bored with You"

And this one which has gone out over a dozen times in the past few years (because it works):

Don't forget: You don't want to dwell on fear for too long. It can demoralize and paralyze the reader, preventing him from taking action to fix his state.

Use the fear to win attention. Shift to hope, desire and solutions to encourage action.

In short emails, 150 words or less, you can put the hope on the page you link to. Anything longer, consider making the turn to positivity in the email.

"Made You Look" Subject Line Type 9
Leveraging Status

Anybody can pretend to be an expert online. Millions do!

Leveraging status enables you to prove you're not a phony. Plus, making big moves creates curiosity about the details and makes you a more attractive individual, almost by default.

What if a subscriber doesn't open the email with the status subject line? Just seeing it gives evidence that you're the kind of expert they want to have in their inbox.

Examples:

"What I didn't reveal on ABC news"
"My meeting at the White House"
"Where should I put my Two Comma Club award?"
"David Deutsch learned this from me"

Maybe your status stories are obvious to you. You already know what you're going to say. Maybe you have to dig around a little.

Don't give up hope. I bet there are plenty of aspects of your life or business that would impress the heck out of your subscribers… if you just told them.

"Made You Look" Subject Line Type 10
Make it Personal

The first time I sent an email with the subject line "Checking in" to my email list, half a dozen people replied because they didn't realize it was a broadcast email.

It's been nearly a decade since that incident. It's less likely to happen today… because everyone has seen some of these personal-sounding subject lines.

That doesn't mean they don't work. They absolutely do, especially if you are the face of your company and your communication style creates the feeling of an actual relationship with your subscribers.

But like anything else, you don't want to overuse these. They lose their potency quickly. Don't use a personal-sounding subject line with an impersonal, corporate-sounding email, either. Kills the vibe.

Because they sound personal, they grab attention and imply that the message inside will be low-key and low-commitment. Don't abuse that attention.

Just in case you hadn't heard, American presidential candidates use personal sounding subject lines… despite the fact their recipients KNOW they'll never be friends with them. But the feeling that there's a connection there can be very influential.

Examples:

"dude, check this out"
"Did I miss your call?"
"This is SO screwed up, [First Name]"

"Made You Look" Subject Line Type 11
The Secret Handshake

This kind of subject line goes back to the relevance and affinity discussion.

Use overt or subtle language to signal to your reader that you're in the same exclusive club. "Your kind of people" will detect what's invisible to others.

Shared values, philosophy, political affiliation, and more all fit under this umbrella.

People LOVE to hear news, facts, stories and opinions that mirror their own worldview. Confirmation bias is real. People also want to connect with others in their tribe. The further outside the mainstream their tribe is, the stronger the bond between members will be.

A person may tend to be rebellious and antisocial toward outsiders… but leadership and persuasion become easier once he knows you're in-group.

Secret handshake subject lines will strengthen your readers' loyalty to you. But you have to be prepared to have people opposed to your tribe or beliefs get hot under the collar.. Because just like confirmation bias, the semmelweis reflex is also real.

And that's fine. You want your email list to be primarily people who see the world the way you see it.

Examples:

"Socialists are coming for your savings"
"If the Bible is your 'thing'"
"Join Our 4th of July Protest" // Preheader Text: "Give me liberty or… naw, just give me liberty"

"Made You Look" Subject Line Templates

Curiosity

1. **How Our Marriage Got Better After 2 Affairs**

Templated: How [Meaningful Position/Condition] Got Better After [Disaster]

2. **Why Content Isn't King (and what you need instead)**

Templated: Why [Popular Advice in Your Niche Is False] (and [alternative])

Story-Based

3. **I tried to fake my death to escape student loans**

Templated: I [went overboard] to escape [problem your ideal client faces]

4. **I'm so glad I failed my Series 7**

Templated: I'm [positive emotion] I [negative-sounding situation your ideal client understands]

Simplicity

5. **Get 61% more email opens in 1 minute**

Templated: [Achieve meaningful, relevant improvement] in [shockingly short time frame]

6. **Simple styling trick instantly elevates any outfit**

Templated: Simple [topic of interest] trick instantly [impressive desired outcome]

Insecurity

7. **Good news for coaches w/ imposter syndrome**

Templated: Good news for [ideal client category] w/ [painful problem]

8. **The Hard-to-Break Habit Keeping You Broke**

Templated: The [Adjective Describing Why Problem Persists] [Behavior] [Current Undesired Outcome]

Unique Benefit

9. **The Cleopatra Beauty Secret that Ruled the World**

Templated: The [Notable Figure] [Area of Desired Improvement] Secret that [Big Accomplishment]

10. **Turns $3 into $35 on YouTube… every time**

Templated: Turns [small input] into [big output] on [mechanism used]... every time

Newsy News

11. **New Biden Scandal Could End His Presidency**

Templated: New [Person of Influence] Scandal/Negative Event Could [Cause Major Change with Significant Consequence]

12. The Banking Crisis Is Worse than We Thought

Templated: The [Topic of Interest] Crisis Is [More Serious] than We Thought

Urgency

13. Gone tonight – Claim your free bonuses now

Templated: Gone [time] – Claim your [offer] now

14. Are You Repelling Clients on IG? Change This Now

Templated: Are You [Working Against Yourself] on [Place]? Change This Now

Fear

15. Don't let AI do this to you

Templated: Don't let [unstoppable change] do this to you

16. Will Google remove your site in 2024, too?

Templated: Will [Influential figure] [take adverse action against you] in [Time/Place], too?

Status

17. Hanging out with Kamala Harris

Templated: Hanging out with [admired person difficult to access]

18. My backwards party after hitting 9-figures

Templated: My [odd celebration] after [noteworthy accomplishment]

<u>Personal</u>

19.   Are you still looking for killer subject lines?

* Variation on Dean Jackson's 9-word email

Templated: Are you still looking for [strong positive adjective] [item your ideal client has expressed interest in]

20.   Your permission slip to go easy on yourself

Templated: Your permission slip to [do something your ideal client wants to do but likely feels guilty about]

<u>Secret Handshake</u>

21.   Screw Excuses
Templated: express strong feelings about something you stand against

22.   Free Resource for Boneheaded Husbands (like me)
Templated: Free Resource for [Unique, Self-Contained Group You and Your Ideal Client Are Both in] (like me)

Final Thoughts

In *Subject Line Science*, I've touched on nearly everything I've learned about writing hard-to-ignore subject lines over the past 16 years (it feels that way, at least)…

And given you nearly every tool and mental model I use when I'm writing them for myself, my clients and the handful of friends I randomly hand them over to.

My goal was to make it as easy as possible to consume and understand. But I know it's still a massive amount of information. And it's generalized for the wide swathe of people who may pick up this book and read it.

I know some readers will have no interest in reading every word in this book. That's okay. The subject line examples and templates were intentionally designed to be easy to access.

As a copywriter, I assume everyone skims everything I write anyway!

Still, I hope you found valuable insight into planning out and writing emails for revenue or revolution… no matter how much or how little you read.

There are two more items I need to cover before finishing up.

Preheader text

After I made my Subject Line of the Day video series, a number of people asked me to make a similar series for preheader/preview text.

I don't think that's possible for me to do… unless I made the preheader videos to go with their respective subject lines.

Because there are 3 objectives I use preheader text to accomplish, and they may overlap:

1) Intensify or "dimensionalize" the main emotion of the subject line
2) Add curiosity
3) Give the reader an idea why the email is relevant to him, if it isn't clear from the subject line

For example, if the subject line is **"Will Florida BAN this book?"** which is both curiosity and newsy news…

You might intensify the curiosity with a preheader text that says **"You won't believe what it says on pg 34."**

If the subject line was more benefit-driven, say, **"Grab this book before Florida bans it"**...

The preheader could be something like **"Don't let them erase your heritage"** to show the reader why it's relevant for him…

Or "**Why does DeSantis want to hide this from you?**" to add more curiosity.

I would not recommend reducing curiosity by naming the book or giving details that make it too obvious.

Maybe the subject line is simpler: "Claim your free copy of my book"...

You can dimensionalize the subject line with a preheader that says **"145 pages of new, science-backed health tips."**

In other words, there are countless ways to use preheaders. As with anything, test different approaches to see if you can find something that works consistently.

But don't sleepwalk through this part. A preheader can undo all the curiosity the subject line builds up. So be careful. Be strategic.

"Made You Look" Subject Line AI Prompt

There are many copywriters today who are more skilled with tools like Claude AI or ChatGPT than I am.

At this time, I'm using it less than 2 hours a week and I haven't gotten it to give me copy-paste ready output I can send to clients. And that's fine. That's not why I'm using the tool.

My preferred use for AI is for coming up with new ideas or quickly coming up with multiple approaches I can use as a starting point.

I usually ask the AI a question *I already have an answer to* (e.g. "how do you write a good subject line?"), and after several rounds of asking for more details or different explanations of its responses, I'll often get something I may not have thought up on my own.

If you're not already doing it, I encourage you to spend some time playing with AI tools. This is technology we're going to have to be familiar with!

For the purposes of this book, though, I thought I'd show you something cool.

I'm playing around with this prompt, which you can use for each of the "Made You Look" secrets. This prompt template gives you a good place to start getting countless subject line variations to try out.

Note: The more details you add about your product/service and ideal client, the better the output will be.

You may have to modify the output to get something closer to what you're looking for. Tell it to be more urgent, to add curiosity, etc.

You'll find you can make them pretty strong with multiple rounds of revisions.

Paste This Prompt

Act as a skilled email copywriter. You are creating an email to sell **[describe product or service, providing name if you want]**. The ideal client is **[give attributes of your client avatar]**.

You want to write these subject lines to focus on **[Made You Look secret]**. Some examples of effective subject lines with the same focus include:

[subject line examples from the specific Made You Look section of the book. Or all 11 sections].

Create 20 unique subject lines for this email. Make them emotional and high in curiosity. Keep them within 35 characters long if possible.

Appendix

Simple Subject Line Tweak Will Put Money In Your Pocket

One of the most powerful shifts you can make to improve your subject lines is to *focus on your ideal client's known self-interest... not on your "thing."*

Let's use an email I received last week as an example. It's subject line was:

🧑🏾‍⚕️3 Surprising Things You Probably Didn't Know About Vitamin C

It's not a bad subject line. But it's not focused on the reader's self-interest.

Most of the subscribers on this email list are probably only moderately interested in vitamins. What they really want is a healthier life.

So how do you shift this subject line to speak to self-interest?

Here are a few ideas that keep most of the same words:

-   3 Surprising Benefits You Get from Vitamin C
-   3 Surprising Reasons Your Body Needs More Vitamin C
-   3 Surprising Health Issues Vitamin C Helps Resolve

See the difference? Again, we barely changed any of the words.

Entrepreneurs/marketers constantly face this temptation. We're so impressed with our "thing" that we're often tempted to put it in the spotlight.

That's a mistake.

Because our readers aren't thinking about or interested in our thing (in most cases). They're thinking about their own situations and aspirations.